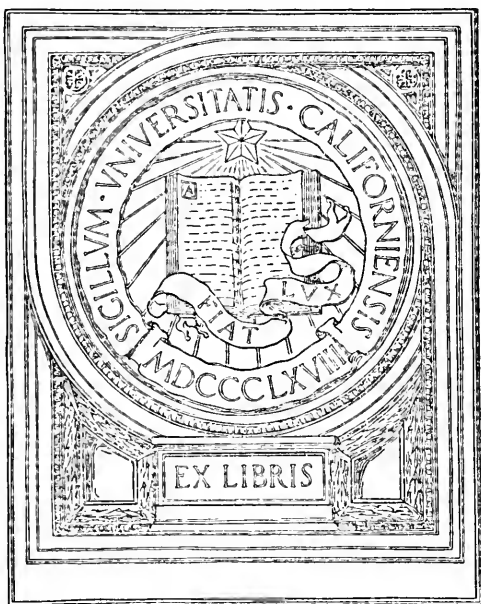
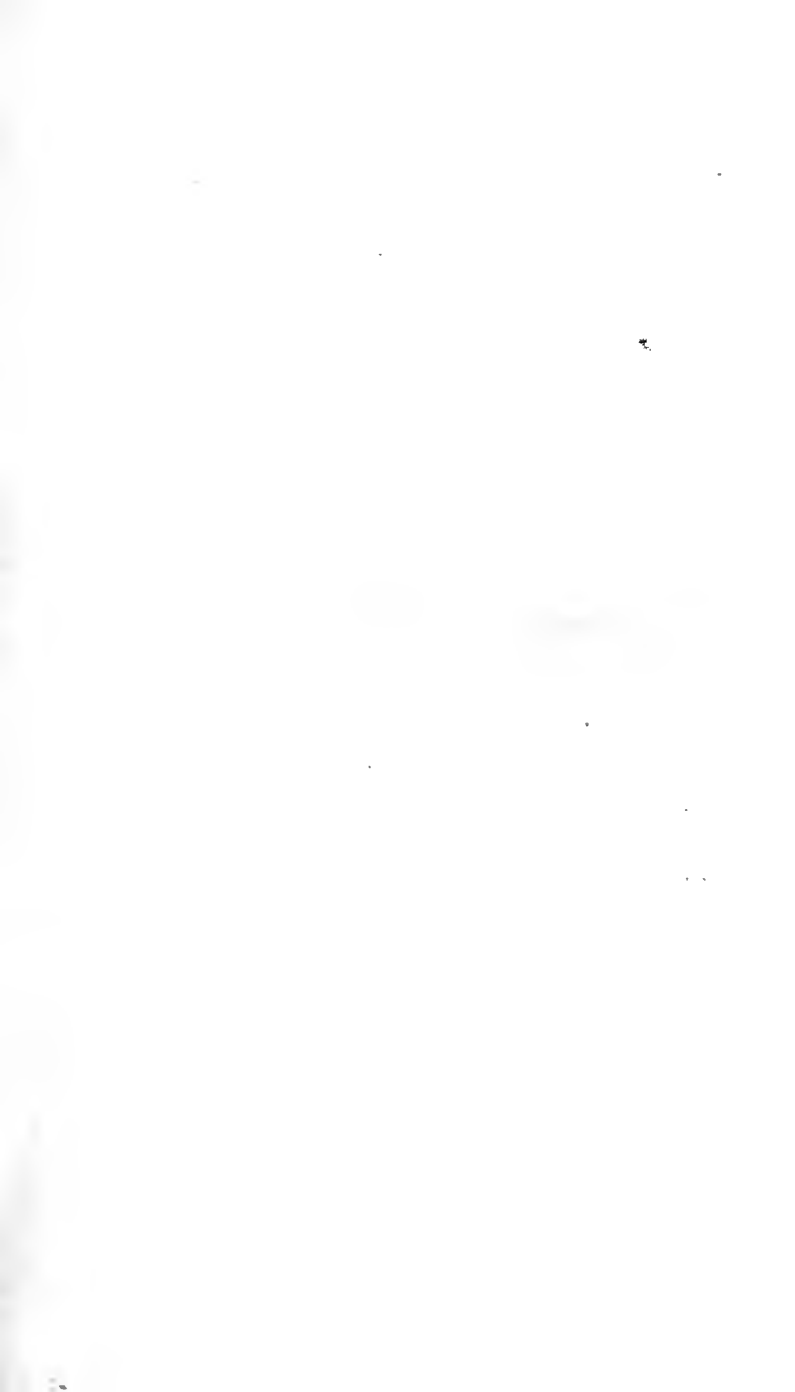
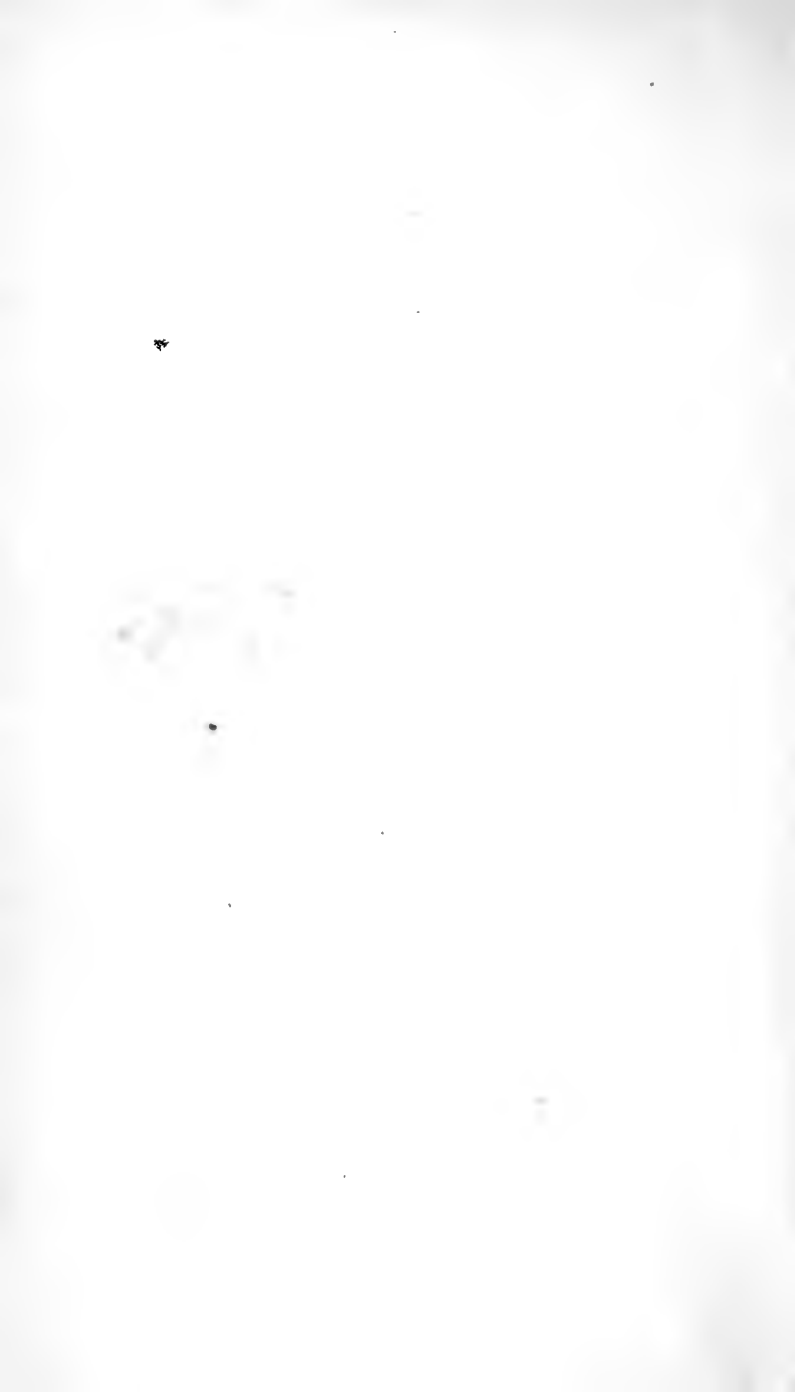




UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA
AT LOS ANGELES







THE BROOKES

BRIDLEMERE.

BY

G. J. WHYTE MELVILLE.

AUTHOR OF "THE GLADIATORS," "DIGBY GRANT," "THE INTERPRETER," "HOLMBY
HOUSE," "THE QUEEN'S MARRIES," ETC.

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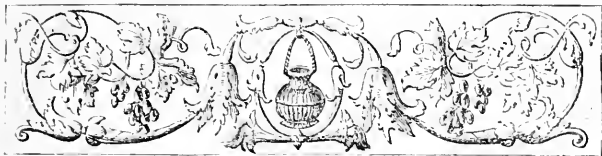
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CONTENTS OF VOL. II.

	CHAPTER I.	PAGE
A BREAK-UP.		1
	CHAPTER II.	
RAISING THE WIND		34
	CHAPTER III.	
CARRYING ON		65
	CHAPTER IV.	
TOO MUCH SAIL		92
	CHAPTER V.	
DRIFTING TO LEEWARD		129
	CHAPTER VI.	
COLD COMFORT		156
	CHAPTER VII.	
PARTNERS		192
	CHAPTER VIII.	
THE LONG LANE		221
	CHAPTER IX.	
PRESSURE		250
	CHAPTER X.	
RECOIL		281

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THE BROOKES OF BRIDLEMERE.

CHAPTER I.

A BREAK-UP.

PERHAPS a fire and a shipwreck are the two scenes of destruction that impress on man's mind most forcibly his own impotency as compared with the elements. The latter of these catastrophes is, indeed, awful during its progress; but when its work is accomplished, not a vestige is left of the ruin that has been effected. The good ship has been broken up; and in a few hours, spars and timbers have been scattered far and wide, while her hull sinks, fathom by fathom, slowly down into the calm mysterious regions of the great deep. Perhaps a summer morning rises smiling and

peaceful on a fatal night, and the sea hides all her secrets under a fair, tranquil bosom, scarcely heaving now from the storm of passions that surged up yesterday so merciless and uncontrolled. She has raged and is comforted. She has destroyed and is appeased.

But with a fire it is otherwise. Grand in its resistless fury while it conquers, it is grander still in its mighty desolation when it has triumphed and died out. There was something glorious and spirit-stirring, though frightful, in the roaring blast, in the ragged jets of flame spouting towards the sky, in the great luminous caverns of crimson and yellow, with their beams and wood-work traced distinct against the glare; in the crash of falling masonry, the clouds of lurid smoke and storms of fiery showers driven through the darkness; but when all this pageantry has sunk and fallen through; when night has passed away; when the cold dawn steals up to discover charred timbers, blackened cornices, jagged walls with strips of shrivelled paper clinging here and there like weeds upon a ruin, household fragments all distorted and defaced; nay, sadder sights than these: the blank space floored with ashes now, that was yesterday a

pile of building, and a home : then it is that we admit the grandeur of a scene thus dignified by desolation, and bow before the grim and dreary majesty of the destroyer who has passed away.

Where the brewery of Stoney Brothers had stood the day before, the most imposing building, the most flourishing concern in the town of Middlesworth, a still November noon smiled upon a wide waste of smouldering, cinder-covered heaps, with here and there a thin white line of smoke rising peacefully into the air. All had been done that could be done: The discipline of the Dancing Hussars, acting on the energy and goodwill of the townsfolk, had, indeed, saved a few waifs and strays from the general destruction. Only two of the grey horses had been burned. One of these, stupefied and fascinated as it were by terror, could not be induced to move ; and the other, extricated with difficulty, reared, plunged, neighed, broke loose, and trotted back to perish with his friend. Rags, who had turned out with his troop, shaking off the fumes of the champagne easily enough when there was a necessity for exertion, gave it as his opinion in the mess-room at breakfast, that “ It was the best grill he ever had the pleasure of

attending," and the simple townsfolk wandered round the ruins with solemn, awe-struck faces, asking foolish questions, and hazarding the most improbable surmises as to the origin of the fire. The children, too, congregating as town-children do, like sparrows, from the very gutters and house-tops, had begun to play about the ruins before they were cold. The muffatee-makers made the catastrophe an excuse for additional potations; the country-folks stared and grinned, and these, too, wondered "how it came about." Nobody seemed to think of Stoney Brothers, holding their business consultation, a couple of ruined men, in the dining-room at the comfortable villa.

How changed since the night they all sat so cosily round the fire, and speculated on a future that was now impossible, and enterprises that must henceforth be abandoned for ever! It was no common loss they had suffered, no blow they had sustained, from which to recover and rise up with hope and energy increased by the very obstacles they had to overcome. It was rather a mortal wound, draining the very tide of life away from their prostrate bodies—a wound it was useless to bear, and impossible to cure.

George Stoney, crossing his arms on the back of his chair, buried his face in them, and sat silent, not moody—far less impatient—only utterly and completely broken down. Always subject to despondency, inclined to take an unpromising view of matters, both present and future, he blamed himself for not having foreseen, even though he could not prevent, the catastrophe. He blamed himself for having embarked so large a capital on a venture, in which the risks were proportionate to the profits; above all, he blamed himself bitterly that he had listened to his brother's persuasions, and delayed the insurance of his new building till it was too late.

But he never hinted to Philip by word or gesture that he attributed their ruin to his counsels. Quiet and indolent as was his disposition, timid and devoid of enterprise, he was a kindly man and a generous. Poverty might enter their household, but disunion never. He was not utterly penniless, for Mrs. George had a small income, enough to ward off absolute want, settled on herself; but he had lost position, capital, business, future: above all, that which could never be recovered, the labour of his prime. Nothing could give him back

that score of years which had made Stoney Brothers the firm it was.

And this is the difference between being knocked down at twenty and at forty. You may be firmer on your legs at the latter age, and it takes a heavier blow to do your business, but you cannot get up again like the young Antæus, who rises from his mother earth the stronger and the fresher for his fall.

Its elasticity seems to me the one distinctive quality of youth. Hope is still in the bottom of the box. It is only after repeated shakings, and when the tenement is a good deal shattered, that she fairly takes to her wings and flies away. But she never comes back again. You do not try to mend the box any more, and she will have nothing to say to a man whose tools are lying useless at his feet.

George sat with his face buried in his arms, and never moved save to look at his brother with a wan, weary smile, intended to signify confidence and goodwill.

The latter remained at a writing-table in the corner of the room, despatching the necessary letters to agents and correspondents, with as much

energy and clearness of head as if they had commenced some fortunate speculation, rather than this lamentable and irretrievable disaster. Some of the books had been saved, though the new counting-house was burned to the ground; and these, tumbled, dirtied, many of them scorched and half-destroyed, lay about his chair. It was obvious, that for hours to come, Philip would have no time for despondency. And yet, though he could write with a steady hand, and an unclouded brow, his was by far the heavier heart of the two. His own griefs, his own ruin, the destruction at one swoop of all his hopes (and no one but himself knew how fair those hopes had blossomed only last night) were swamped in his feelings of stinging reproach about the insurance. It was maddening to know that he had sacrificed the whole business to a saving of one paltry quarter's payment. He *would* not think of it. He worked with an energy almost savage, to have no time for reflection, and while he worked, a pang, that was like physical pain, shot across him as he remembered the difference between yesterday and to-day.

Yet he wondered, too, and blamed himself, that

he was not more miserable; that the gleam from a pair of dark eyes shed on him last night, should still have power, notwithstanding all that had passed since, to brighten the gloom of his lot, and that the glory should not have entirely departed, though the angel had left him hours ago.

There is a proverb in daily use amongst old women of both sexes, affording them, as it would seem, much solace for the troubles of their juniors, to the effect, that “the course of true love never yet ran smooth.” I know not why this superstition of the heart should be more engrossing when tossing down the mountain torrent, than when floating calmly on the surface of a mild canal. I see no reason for desire, simply because its object is out of reach. A Dutchman, for instance, making love over his pipe in a summer-house to his cousin, whom he is intended by both families to marry, ought to be capable of as warm and tender an affection, as the Montague to whom it is certain death to woo one of the House of Capulet. Yet, I doubt, if the kiss of prosperous and plighted love is ever pressed so longingly, so closely, as the wild, hopeless caress that seals an eternal farewell for lips, which never should

have met, and parting now, must drink their bitter punishment—and never smile, except in mockery, again. The wound is too deep for balm; the pain too keen for tears; and yet—and yet—would they have had it otherwise if they could?

It is a dangerous example to follow that of

“ The Squyer of lowe degree,
Who loved the King’s daughter of Hongarye,”

seldom guiding its imitators to a happy termination.

The “ Squyer’s ” life and best energies are usually wasted in the process; and the Princess, though she wears a calmer brow, and neither neglects her head-gear, nor her manners, nor the duties of her station, carries an aching heart with her, unsuspected, to the grave.

But both have learned the great lesson of humanity, cheap at any cost of suffering or despair: the great lesson of self-sacrifice, which is the soul’s training for immortality.

Now Philip Stoney had, no doubt, set his wishes on a prize which hung a good way further up the ladder than he could expect to climb. Nevertheless, it was hard to see the rungs break just as he

got his feet upon them. I make no secret of his love for Miss Brooke—a love which, at the best of times, he considered foolish and presumptuous, so to be cherished accordingly ; which was now utterly hopeless, and, therefore, hugged closer than ever to his heart.

Into Miss Brooke's sentiments I have neither the wish nor the power to penetrate. Ladies are accomplished hypocrites from the cradle, and possess, moreover, an idiosyncrasy which defies speculation. If people habitually avoid what they wish, consider Yes and No convertible terms, and delight in bathing one foot only at a time in the Rubicon, drawing back obstinately when there is no safety but in passing over ; doing these things, observe, only not so invariably as might establish a rule of contrary by which to predict their conduct, it is obvious that on such natures argument by analogy is thrown away, and that no series of previous observation, no system of inductive reasoning, can afford the slightest clue to a labyrinth in which the paths are devious, eccentric, and, to all appearance, wholly aimless and unaccountable.

Philip then sat immersed in books and calcu-

lations. The thing was to be faced; liabilities must be met; a settlement, however fractional, should be at once promised; and payment of twenty shillings in the pound eventually worked out.

George still buried his head in his hands: if he lifted his eyes, it was but to stare vacantly at the fire, and sink down again more listlessly than before.

Presently a patter of feet was heard on the stairs, finishing in a bound that cleared the three last steps, and shook the whole house; then the small body from which this vibration proceeded, rattled the handle of the door with much impatience, and rushing in, leapt to George Stoney's neck, with a merry laugh that brought warmth and consolation even to the heart of a ruined man.

"Oh! Papa," exclaimed Dot, settling herself comfortably, with her knees in the pit of his stomach, "if you could have seen Jane running after me to the nursery, and I hid behind the door, and Jane looked under the bed, and in our cupboard, and found my Noah's ark, and said, 'Miss Dot, you naughty, *naughty* child, wherever have you got to?' and I ran out again like puss in the corner, and Jane couldn't catch me,

and I came down as quick as ever I could to play with you and Uncle Phil, for a little ; and I'll be quiet now, Papa, dear, because you've got a headache ;" and so concluded her breathless string of sentences, by squeezing his nose flat against her own in a tight and merciless embrace.

Mrs. George had a woman's tact in some things, notwithstanding her violent dresses, and her feud with Lady Waywarden. She had sent the child down first, because her instincts told her that an appeal to his protection would most readily arouse her husband from his apathy ; that the sight of Miss Dot, with her sunny curls, and her merry eyes, would remind him far more forcibly than any reasoning she could urge, that he had not lost all yet ; that there was something still left for which it was a duty to labour, and a pleasure to live. She followed her child almost immediately, and laid her hand upon her husband's shoulder, glancing towards Philip, working sternly in his corner, with an approving smile, ere she began her process of consolation in her own way, and in her loftiest vein.

I need scarcely observe that, on being informed of the catastrophe, her first impulse was to blame

somebody; and it was a good thing now that Stoney Brothers had established a wholesome rule of discussing business matters in business places. If they should happen to touch upon "the shop" over their wine, they never brought it with them across the threshold of the drawing-room in to tea. It is only by strict adherence to this practice that men can insure necessary repose and a healthy change of thought in the bosom of their families. Mrs. George, therefore, had no clue whatever to the origin of the fire, and was utterly in the dark concerning the delay in effecting an insurance; but what she did know was that the town engine had been thirty-five minutes in getting under weigh for the scene of action, and when it arrived, had about as much effect in subduing the flames as might have been expected from the squirt she kept for the amusement of her children upstairs. Its inefficiency was therefore a fertile theme on which to descant; and Mrs. George, not the least hampered by an unweaned baby, which she carried in the usual place, descanted on it accordingly.

"I'm sure," said she, gleanng her consolations, and tying them up, as it were, into a sheaf, while she went along, "I'm sure, George, it's only pro-

vidential that it wasn't here, and us, you know, at the ball, and Jane such a heavy sleeper, and cook gone to see her aunt. Why, the children would have been burned in their beds. If it hadn't been for the extraordinary inefficiency of our fire-engine—and I remember, George, the very words I used when we saw it, last June twelvemonth, locked up behind the gaol, and the key two miles off, at the police-station; and Philip said I was quite right, didn't you, Philip? I say, that if our Town Council did its duty, they'd have got the fire under by daybreak; and if it had been here, a mile and a quarter further, George, and up-hill all the way, I do believe it wouldn't have reached us till there wasn't a stick standing, and we should have been without a rag to cover us, or a bed to lie upon. It's a mercy, and a providence, I declare, George, and we ought really to be thankful that it's no worse!"

George looked up wistfully, drawing his hand through Dot's pendent curls—

"Worse! Bella," said he; "a man can't well be worse than ruined, can he?"

But Bella was not to be so put down. Shifting the baby to an unexhausted posture with the

facility of constant practice, she bade Dot, who had not moved, sharply to "be quiet," and replied with dignity—

"No man is ruined, George, who retains his good name, and his respectability, and his station, and who has married into a genteel family, as you have done. My dear old man," she added, suddenly coming down off her stilts, and with her unoccupied hand pressing his head to the unoccupied part of her bosom, "how *can* you be ruined when you've got me, and Dot, and baby here, and the children, and Philip—our dear, good Philip, who works harder than all the rest of us put together?"

Philip heard, but made as though he heard not, bending fiercely over a ledger, so that none should see his face. He had sustained a bitter twinge or two this morning already, but none hurt worse than this. Perhaps Dot suspected something of the kind, for she slid down from papa's lap, and went to Uncle Phil, standing close behind his chair, perfectly quiet, and with rather a puzzled face, neither springing to his knee, nor making painful plunges at his whiskers, as was her wont. If she was surprised or hurt that he took no notice

of her, she never showed it. Children seem to know instinctively when things are going wrong, and in perceptive power Miss Dot was no whit behind her neighbours.

George Stoney took heart of grace when he looked at his wife's happy, handsome countenance. She was the master-spirit, and he knew it. So did she, of course. It dawned upon him that if Bella thought matters were not irremediable, why, things might not be so bad, after all. Bella was shrewd. Bella was cautious. Bella must know best. Perhaps they might be tolerably comfortable still. Then he remembered that although his wife's income would keep him and his children from absolute *hunger*, Philip had not a shilling left in the world. He leant his head down, and groaned in weariness of spirit once more.

But Bella seemed to read his thoughts, and to have reflected on this contingency as well.

"I remember when I was at school, George, and though Dot *does* grow fast, it's not so long ago, we used to have a fable to turn into French, about a man and a bundle of sticks. I never forget what I've once learned, George; indeed, I think my memory is better than yours or

Philip's. I don't call to mind, at this moment, what the French is for a bundle, but that's immaterial (Dot, don't tease your uncle!). Now I remember perfectly well that the man couldn't break the sticks till he untied the bundle, and snapped them one by one. George, dear, we're only a bundle of sticks now, and we must keep ourselves tied up. Philip must live with us, as he's always done. Why, Dot there would break her little heart without her uncle, though I must say I think he spoils her most injudiciously, and that's the truth!"

Mrs. George finished with a triumphant wave of the baby's whole body, that did not, however, the least interfere with its occupation; it was still combining the gratification of appetite with the comfort of repose. Philip raised his head from a half-consumed ledger—

"Bella," said he, "you're the best woman, and the most generous in the world. But what you offer is impossible. I must fight my own way now, till better times come round. I must leave you all, dear, kind as you are to me—George and you, and the children and Dot."

He bent his head over his work again very

resolutely, and Dot, who understood him pretty well, and did by no means approve of the arrangement, made up her face for a howl.

This performance must have roused the baby, who would doubtless have shared in the concert, but fortunately Jane tapped at the door, and, entering immediately, quelled the coming outbreak with her presence and authority.

"If you please, ma'am," gasped that decorous person, whose composure late events had completely destroyed, "there's a old woman on the stairs as says she *must* see you or master, and is eryin' dreadful. She say she have a son employed in the business, and he were at the brewery, she know, last night, and she have never set eyes on him since; but she have been lookin' for him all this mornin', here, there, and everywhere; and oh, ma'am!" added Jane, fairly breaking down on her own account, "it's awful to think that perhaps he may be nowheres, after all!"

"Bring in some wine," said Mrs. George, composedly, for she had a firm feminine faith in stimulants under every disorder of body or mind, "and tell her to come here directly. Poor old

thing! I dare say she's frightened out of her life about nothing, and only wants a little sensible advice to set her right."

George groaned at this unlooked-for addition to his troubles. Philip left his ledger, and walked across the room to where his sister-in-law stood, pursued by Dot, who never let go of his coat-tail.

Dame Batters followed Jane into the room, with a strange, scared look upon her white, withered face. She had dressed herself in her best clothes—a poor old suit of rusty weeds—for the occasion, and she twitched nervously at the fingers of her worn thread gloves, while she glanced appealingly from one of the gentlefolks to the other, and made her little respectful curtsy, in defiance of a mortal anxiety about her child.

"I made bold to come, ma'am," she began, in very shaking accents, "and askin' pardon, you see, ma'am, of your good gentleman and Master Philip there," with another Sunday-school "bob" at each of their names, "for a bringin' in of *my* trouble along o' *your* trouble, and wishin' of you comfort and relief where only comfort and

relief is to be found; and it's Master Philip as I was a wantin' to speak to most, for it's him as engages the men, and—oh, my boy! my boy! Where is he? What have you done with him? You didn't ought to have taken my Jem away from me, if you couldn't give him me back again. And me an old woman, so near my time! Oh, dear! oh, dear! my boy! my pretty boy! What *shall* I do? what *shall* I do?"

She sat down on one of the drawing-room chairs, and rocked to and fro. Even in her misery she kept on the extreme edge of the seat, and spared the carpet as much as she could from contact with her muddy shoes.

George had not courage to look at her. Philip went and took her hand. Dot, spell-bound, with mouth and eyes wide open, watched her mother's movements, as the latter poured out a glass of sherry, and forced it on the poor shaking old dame. Mrs. George was always composed in such cases. Though she would have offered a cup of cold water in a manner to have shocked Brummell, who once told a lady that she *took* physic, *took* advice, *took* a liberty, but *drank* tea, she was a capital nurse on most occasions, and

especially proud of her skill in defeating hysteria, whether natural or assumed.

“Take some wine!” she said, very authoritatively, and held the glass herself to the trembling, toothless lips. “Empty it! down with it, every drop! Now, my good dame, Philip will tell you all he knows about your son. It seems impossible he can have come to harm last night in our terrible disaster. Philip will tell you. Philip knows. Philip has been making inquiries all the morning.”

Mrs. George shuddered, nevertheless, at the horrible vision her own attempts at consolation conjured up. There was no doubt that Jem Batters had been the last person seen in the brewery; that it was his turn to sit up all night for the express purpose of preventing the catastrophe that had actually taken place; neither had anybody set eyes on him since. The only hope lay in the fact that not the slightest trace of a man’s dress or a man’s bones had as yet been discovered among the ruins. This consolation, however, would tell also in another and more dreadful sense. He might have been so entirely consumed that not a cinder of him was left, and

this, indeed, seemed the more probable result of the two.

Philip tried to reason with the poor old woman, but in vain. He urged every argument he could think of in extenuation of the ghastly surmise that was present to all their minds, though none of them would have admitted it. Dame Batters always returned to her unanswerable argument—

“If he wur alive, he’d a come to his poor old mother. Such a good son, as he allays wur, my Jem. Not steady, you know, like some on ’em, though I paid his schoolin’ regular after his poor father was gone. But a good son, allays wur, and allays will be—there!”

Then she seemed to try and remember something, looking blankly at the wall, and gasping, while she fumbled, with her trembling old hands, at her bonnet-strings.

But Mrs. Stoney’s remedy, simple as it was, had its effect. As the wine nerved her system, the gasping ceased, and presently large tears gathered slowly in the dim, bleared eyes of the grief-stricken mother. Then Dot, whose attention had never wandered from her for an instant, reached up a little hand, and stroked the wrinkled cheek, mur-

muring, "Poor, poor!" and so the flood-gates opened. She wept on unrestrainedly, and grew every moment more hopeful and more composed.

By degrees, Philip induced her to take a less desponding view of her son's disappearance. After a while, she became sanguine enough to feel hurt, and even angry, that he had not been to see her, knowing she must be so anxious; and then she got better every minute. But she had not left the house-door a hundred yards behind, ere a relapse came on, and a tidy, showily-dressed little personage, coming to pay Mrs. George Stoney a visit, was rather shocked to see a dingy old woman sitting on a heap of stones by the wayside, crying as if her heart would break, and, without being uncharitable, came to the inevitable conclusion that she was drunk.

Now this showily-dressed personage was no other than Miss Prince, who had journeyed all the way from Tollesdale to Middlesworth in a fly, on receipt of the intelligence that her old friend Isabella Richards was in sorrow, and her husband's brewery burnt to the ground. Miss Prince, you see, with her anatomically disproportionate heart, was a thoroughly unselfish little woman, and never

grudged trouble or discomfort in the cause of a friend. Her present expedition had been productive of both. In the first place, Miss Prince entertained a profound distrust of all such vehicles and horses as are licensed by Government to be let for hire. She was persuaded that the animals were unsafe, vicious and unsound; purchased therefore by the proprietors at a low price, with a culpable disregard for human life; that the conveyances furnished were faulty in construction, and liable to upset on any irregularity of surface, besides having broken springs, worn-out tires, and linch-pins on which no reliance could be placed down-hill. She was satisfied, too, from her own observation and experience, that the drivers were sometimes uncivil, often inebriated; that they hurried recklessly over the most dangerous parts of the road, without attaining a proper average of speed on the whole distance; and that their extortions at its close were in direct proportion to the discomfort inflicted on the passenger during the journey. With these apprehensions and these sentiments, a drive of a few miles in a hired carriage of any description was to Miss Prince an ordeal by fear, an ordeal by suffering, and an ordeal by battle.

Also, before starting, she had a difference of opinion with Lady Waywarden—first, on the necessity; secondly, on the feasibility; and finally, on the propriety of her expedition.

Beaten in detail on each of these points, her ladyship had retired, like a skilful general, on the next, and indeed had brought her forces up for general action, along the whole line, when the announcement of Miss Prince's fly at the door put an end to the controversy. She retired then from the struggle; but her companion knew too well that it would be resumed, again and again, till she had given in a humiliating and unqualified submission. All this worked in Miss Prince's mind, and brought into shape a scheme on which she had long meditated, but never yet mustered courage to put in practice.

Lady Waywarden was not one bit a more difficult person to live with than ninety-and-nine other ladies, who find it conduces to their own comfort to make another woman uncomfortable, under the name of a companion. She possessed intellect above the average; a fine sense of the *argumentum ad absurdum*, and not more selfishness than properly belonged to her habits of life and

station. If you had said to her, "You pay a lady of education and refinement to do that which is repugnant to your own estimate of those qualities; you require her to possess such manners as shall entitle her to live on terms of equality with yourself, and yet lose no opportunity of impressing on her, by word and deed, that she is your inferior and subordinate; you purchase, at a very inadequate remuneration, her time, her inclinations, her opinions, her self-respect, above all, her prejudices; and you expect, that by calling her a companion and making her dine with you at eight o'clock, which probably disagrees with her, she will thankfully accept your whims, your sarcasms, your thoughtless ridicule, your wilful neglect, and will forget, because she sits in the drawing-room (not in an easy-chair), that she has none of the personal freedom enjoyed by the domestics below stairs; not one-tenth of the comforts of the steward's room, or the ease of the servants' hall." If, I say, you had urged such a protest as this on Lady Waywarden, she would simply have considered you odious, vulgar, and presuming, with a democratic tendency to confound the distinctions of society, and strong symptoms of madness, premonitory or confirmed.

Her ladyship's own opinion was, that she paid her daughter's ex-governess a liberal salary for the performance of very trifling duties; and she summed up her convictions in the light and easy nature of her yoke, with the comfortable assurance that "Miss Prince don't mind it."

But Miss Prince *did* mind, nevertheless. For months past she had been gathering resolution to leave Tollesdale and set up once more for herself. She had talked it over with Lady Julia; for Miss Prince could no more do without a confidant and adviser, than without a box of Child's night-lights and a double night-cap. The young lady, in her usual free-spoken way, had much shocked her by declaring, "If I was you, and mamma ever pitched into me again, I would very soon make my lucky, and hang out on my own hook somewhere else;" nor was this advice, though couched in the terms Viscount Nethersole brought with him from Eton, so unpalatable as the language in which it was offered. They had even got so far as consulting upon ways and means, wherein the pupil's worldly knowledge far exceeded that of her former governess. Notwithstanding the drawback of her invalid sister, years of economy, and an unex-

pected legacy from her military uncle, as she called the clerk in the War Office, had made of Miss Prince a small capitalist. Probably, her all might have represented two years of Lady Waywarden's pin-money. This nest-egg she had at last resolved to cook, in such a manner, however, as to extract from it the greatest quantity of nourishment. A furnished house in a *genteel situation*, of which she should let off the different floors to quiet lodgers at exorbitant rents, was Miss Prince's idea of independence ; perhaps because it was as yet untried. Lady Julia warmly supported the plan. It would be so pleasant, she thought, to take flowers and things from Covent Garden to her old governess, in her morning drives, the days papa was too lazy to ride, and Cockamaroo, the well-bred, white-legged chestnut was missed by his admirers and his mistresses in the Park. Miss Prince's future, therefore, although she was an elderly lady, was only just opening on her, you see, when she started for the George Stoney's, that morning after the fire.

She had put on her smartest clothes ; people generally do when they pay visits of condolence. She came in with a shawl of great splendour,

fastened high up round her throat, gloves and ribbons of dazzling hue to match, and a whole hamper of vegetables in her bonnet. Even Jane was confounded by her prismatic appearance, and stood aghast, with the door in her hand, while the little woman, running up to Mrs. George, fairly disappeared in that ample lady's embrace, and without speaking a word, burst out crying immediately as if her heart would break.

"Take a glass of wine," said Mrs. Stoney, confident in the universal *panacea*—the perfect cure!—and she signed to George and Philip to leave the room; but against this the little woman proceeded hysterically to protest, entreating their forbearance, and gulping little mouthfuls of sherry, most of which found its way into her eyes and nose, and windpipe, with incoherent assurances of friendship, and promises of composure between the gasps.

"To think I should find you here, dear!" she at length mustered steadiness to exclaim, as if her own home had been the last place in which to look for Mrs. George. "To think of my dear Bella—I always called you Bella, you know, when you were in disgrace—my dear Bella, burnt out, and—and

in such a state altogether," proceeded Miss Prince, looking round the room, as if its walls were blackening and smouldering into ruin. "My dear, I couldn't have believed it, if I hadn't seen it; and, to speak the truth—we've never had any secrets, have we, dear?—I've just popped over from Tollesdale to see how you bore it, and to tell you I'm going to leave Lady Waywarden; and—and—to know if I cannot be of any assistance?—There! Now it's out; and I'm better."

"It was like you, dear Miss Prince," said Mrs. George, quietly, while her husband and Philip shook the new visitor by the hand. "You'll take your bonnet off, won't you? And so you've closed your engagement with Lady Waywarden. Well, I always did say—"

But here Miss Prince, in a high state of nervousness, interrupted, holding her bonnet on with both hands, as though she feared it might be violently abstracted, and she was quite unequal to the occasion without it.

"A word on business first, dear Bella; your good husband and Mr. Philip will excuse me. Gentlemen understand business so much better than ladies. It's partly to ask their advice that I

came. You see, Mr. Stoney, I've some hundreds of pounds to invest just now—not many. Therefore, I'm told, building is the best of all speculations; and so I thought perhaps you might intend restoring the brewery, with all the modern improvements of course," explained Miss Prince, taking for granted she was giving the conversation a thoroughly practical turn, "and that you wouldn't mind allowing my small matter to remain in your hands, at whatever interest you thought proper, and indeed that could be quite an after consideration. You see, I don't understand business; yet I've made Bella there a pretty good accountant, Mr. Stoney, you'll confess; though, when I first began with her, she couldn't make a sum of simple addition come the same twice over; but now—" and here, in her endeavours to cheer them all up, Miss Prince tried to laugh and burst into a sobbing, choking fit of such a violent nature as might have been alarming and even prejudicial to a nursing lady of less experience and composure than Mrs. George.

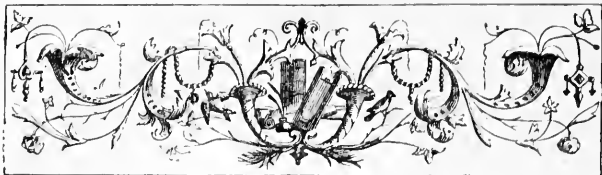
Philip and his brother looked at one another silently for a minute, then the latter took Miss Prince solemnly by the hand—"I understand

you," said he; "a child like Dot here might understand such simple, staunch generosity as yours. You want to throw all you have into the gulf of my ruin; and if I allowed you, I should not only be a rogue, but a brute!"

"You misunderstand me quite," she interposed hurriedly, and with strong symptoms of the hysterics coming on again. "It is a mere matter of business; isn't it, Mr. Philip? You would make it up eventually. You would return me more than I advanced. It would be the foundation of a fortune to me. Out of evil springs good, you know. Oh!" she added, holding fast by the bonnet, and looking imploringly from one to the other, to fix her eyes at last on her old pupil, "let me help you, Bella. Bella, let me do something for you! Let me lend you a hundred pounds, at least! Fifty pounds—twenty pounds—ten pounds! Don't send me away without giving me *some* consolation; if it was only a beggarly ten-pound note."

Pending the delivery of this address, Mrs. George was observed to rock her baby violently to and fro, much to the derangement of its digestive functions, until a sudden impulse prompted

her to seize on Dot, and carry both children tumultuously from the room, followed wildly by Miss Princee, who had not, as yet, taken off a single article of her out-of-door clothing. Mrs. George's bed-room door was then heard to close with a bang, and notwithstanding that lady's stoical composure during the whole morning, it is my belief that the two women having fled to sanctuary, refreshed themselves with a good, hearty, comfortable cry upstairs.



CHAPTER II.

RAISING THE WIND.

IT must not be supposed that the effects of a Middlesworth ball died out with the extinction of its lights, or the retirement of Tootle and Dinnè from their musicians' gallery above; nor even with the putting to rights of the Town Hall—a process that occupied the whole of the following day. On the contrary, seeds were annually sown at these gatherings, which did not come to ear for months, or even years—seeds of rivalry, of friendship, of contention, of goodwill; sometimes, of true and deep affection, yielding eventually a golden harvest, to be reaped and gathered and garnered up for the abiding riches of two lifetimes. In the present, no less than in former instances,

many and various were the results of the ball I have ventured to describe. Few of the young people who attended it were altogether free from its subsequent influence. Lady Julia, although hardened by a couple of London seasons, and, so to speak, acclimatised to balls, seemed confirmed in many whims and vagaries, which had been considered heretofore but passing caprices of the moment; the very next day, sitting with her mother after luncheon, pretending to work, she had expressed herself in a vague and contradictory manner, touching her evening's amusement.

“Of course, there were all sorts of people there, my dear,” observed Lady Waywarden, settling her feet on the fender and her back to the boudoir window, through which even the November daylight came in rose-tinted, though subdued. “People not even second-rate, and that your father wishes one to know. So absurd! I often wonder what vulgar people and fools, my dear, were made for? I suppose we shall learn in a future state. Really, I’m glad I stayed at home. So it was a wretched ball, was it, Ju?”

“Infamous,” answered the young lady, with a mischievous smile gleaming in her eyes. “A war

dance, literally, of savage tribes, mamma; but without scalps, you know, and the war-paint very badly put on."

"Were there any tolerable dresses?" asked Lady Waywarden, languidly. "Of course, the country people made themselves frights. How did the Duchess look?"

"Too much top-hamper," answered the daughter. "Otherwise, well turned out. That Italian maid knows nothing about hair-dressing. The Duchess's wreath was all adrift after the second waltz. Never mind, she's a darling! and I wish she hadn't been obliged to start off before luncheon. It's deadly lively, now they're all gone."

"Complimentary, my dear," observed the elder lady, totally unmoved, however, by the inference. "So you were bored, my poor child, I fear?"

"Dreadfully," assented the other; "and yet I should like to be going again to-night, mamma," she added, with a sigh.

Now this seemed to have become Lady Julia's normal state for a considerable period. She was still brilliant, amusing, full of fun, devoted to papa, and fearfully addicted to slang, yet, at the same time, she had occasional fits of depression;

brief, indeed, and succeeded by unnaturally high spirits, but which puzzled Miss Prince considerably, though they escaped the notice of Lady Waywarden.

"You never were remarkable for consistency, my dear," observed the ex-governess, one day, to her former pupil; "but now you don't know your own mind for two minutes together."

To which Lady Julia replied—"I wish I didn't, my dear; I should be a precious deal jollier!"—refusing, however, any further explanation of this dark and morbid sentiment.

Miss Prince was really going away now, so of course she and her pupil were fonder of each other than ever.

Miss Brooke, too, performing her daily routine of duties at Bridlemere, seemed more tired by her ball than was natural for an able-bodied young woman, who had danced but half a dozen dances, in a room not over-crowded, and with a good floor. Neither did her fatigue wear off with the lapse of time. On the contrary, week by week, Helen's cheek grew paler, and her smile less frequent. She tended her father more studiously than ever; she went about too as regularly amongst the poor,

never missing dame Batters, and affording that sorrowing old woman all the consolation possible under her bereavement, for there were no tidings of Jem. But her walks no longer made her face glow, and her eyes sparkle, as they used a while ago. She ran up no red ensign now, and even the white flag under which she cruised was hoisted, so to speak, but half-mast high. Nay, even after Mr. Multiple had called, and he often came to Bridlemere of late, her depression appeared more decided than before.

Such a visitor one would have thought must have been enlivening to any lady. He was well dressed, he was, yes, he *was* good looking, no doubt. Mrs. George Stoney, indeed, at the ball, had ruled that he was "a handsome, and remarkably stylish man." He could talk on any subject fluently, and knew all the news and gossip of town and country. Moreover, he thought Helen beautiful, and did not conceal his admiration.

He was a great friend too of her brother, not of Jack; though they were scrupulously civil, there was a natural antipathy between these two gentlemen; but with the hussar he was hand-and-

glove. Why could he not stand equally high in the good graces of Miss Brooke?

Multiple seemed fairly settled now at Middlesworth. Whatever was his business, it would appear that it bore neglect without prejudice, or could be carried on with advantage from a distance. He had moved from No. 6, into the most commodious set of rooms in the "Plantagenet Arms," giving choice little dinners, to the infinite profit of that establishment, and submitting to exorbitant charges, on condition that he furnished his own wine. He was not, however, a man who shut his eyes to imposition. He took care to let his entertainers know that he submitted less from ignorance than forbearance. Therefore, he was better treated than more confiding customers. He brought down four good weight-carrying horses, from some mysterious hunting quarters on the London and North Western line. Horses that he gave three hundred a piece for, and that were well worth two. He rode them fairly, steadily; not exactly in the front rank, but with no more scrupulous regard for safety than the generality of the field. His red coat was well made, his boots and breeches were well put on. His second horseman came up

in the nick of time, with a capacious silver sandwich-box, flanked by a double flask of sherry, and he gave away cigars of unusual size and fragrance, with indiscriminate liberality. At the covert-side he became undoubtedly rather popular than otherwise, and the general opinion there was that he meant to stand for the town. In Middlesworth itself they did not know what to make of him; but on his offering to give ten pounds, unsolicited, to a local charity, the sitting Member, whose seat, though perfection in the saddle, was very insecure at Westminster, received a hint from his committee to bestir himself, for that there was a hidden enemy in the field.

Even at Middlesworth, people do not hunt every day, nor, if they did, would four horses be sufficient for the purpose, except on paper. Mr. Multiple, I think, liked his off-days the best. If he could make an excuse, he generally called at Bridlemere; if that was impracticable, he wrote a vast quantity of letters, and then lounged up to the barracks, where an idle man is always acceptable. Arm-in-arm with Walter Brooke, the pair trod the pavement of Middlesworth in a style to which the honest townsfolk were totally unaccus-

tomed. Two such elaborately-dressed dandies might have attracted notice even in London. The muffatee-makers, male and female, audibly expressed their sentiments of admiration and disgust : the young ladies in the bonnet-shop put their stitches in all awry, for five minutes after they had passed ; and Mr. Dowlas, looking wildly for his young man to measure off a yard of calico, would discover him bare-headed in the street, gazing after the twofold apparition with many conflicting feelings, of which envy was the strongest, depicted on his round and simple face. Their conversation on such occasions, I am bound to say, was neither amusing nor instructive. It consisted usually of the following remarks, varied only in emphasis by the weather, and the state of the speaker's digestion :

“Dull place this, the days there's no hunting.”

“Beastly hole !”

“I never came across so few pretty women.”

“Nor so many ugly ones.”

“Have you seen to-day's paper ?”

“I *trust* it's not going to freeze.”

“Let's go up to the barracks, and draw Rags.”

With which proposal they mended their pace,

and walked on resolutely, as men who have now an aim and an object in life.

Rags, I need hardly state, was too glad to receive them. Hospitality itself, and abounding in leisure, all comers were welcome to his barrack-room. Of late, too, Rags had become more of a dandy-worshipper than ever, and his confirmation in this fallacy was another result of the past Middlesworth ball.

That one dance with the Duchess, simple quadrille though it was, had produced no trifling effects on both. With her Grace, indeed, its influence was purely physical. Overheated, at any rate, by a previous waltz, and standing in the draught of the doorway, she had caught a cold that confined her to her room, a most impatient patient, for weeks. But Rags, who never had a cold in his life, did not come off so easily. Raised by the charming manners of his partner to the seventh heaven of social gratification, his moral being had been shaken to its centre the while. He was no longer satisfied with the gaieties of the mess-room, and the triumphs of the barrack-yard. He was fit for something better, he began to think, than the bandying of jokes with the veterinary surgeon, or

the leading of a squadron straight on a given point, at a walk. Visions began to flit through his brain of an exchange into the Life Guards; a quiet brougham to take him out to dinner; a stall at the opera, and a tea-cart to drive in the Park. He seemed to have been vegetating, hitherto, a cauliflower in the country, when he ought to be transplanted as an exotic to the town. Why, these great ladies were not so formidable after all! The Duchess was infinitely easier to get on with than Mrs. George Stoney; her words were not half so long, nor her manners half so imperial. How pleasant to meet her on the same terms in London, and to do the Duchess justice, she made no difference in her simple, cordial, unaffected *accueil*, whether in town or country. But innocent Rags had never yet experienced a chill from these atmospheric changes. He little knew how cold the wind sometimes blows off the *glaciers* in Mayfair. All fine ladies cannot be at the tip-top of the ladder, like the Duchess of Merthyr-Tydvil, and if they must be more civil than they like to those above them, why of course they may be as rude as they please to those below. A man is a ludicrous object, no

doubt, with the pleasant smile frozen on his face by a little contemptuous nod, and his extended hand put hastily back in his pocket, or anywhere else, out of sight. But as these kindly little offices are never proffered to such monsters as from age, self-esteem, or a happy stolidity, have become callous and indifferent, I gather, that the more ingenuous the victim, the more exhilarating must be the sport. Rags might have gained some insight into these peculiarities could he have contrasted the welcome of Lady Waywarden, for instance, in her own house at Tollesdale, with her greeting under other roofs in the neighbourhood of Grosvenor Square.

Mr. de Rolle was all on fire now to go to St. Barbs. The Duke was to have a hunting party the following week, and he would have given a good deal for an invitation, to which, however, he did not quite see his way. I do not mean to say that Rags was fool enough to have fallen in love with the Duchess of Merthyr-Tydvil, but everybody knows the effect on a young and inexperienced man, of association with a woman his superior in rank, intellect, attainments, and surroundings; beautiful besides, and approaching, as

he sees her from below, to his imaginary ideal of perfection. It refines him ; it elevates him ; it sheds over him the first tinge of romance, that is to be fully coloured hereafter by another hand.

It was, I conceive, something of this vague, yet lofty devotion, to a sentiment rather than an individual, which, in the days of chivalry, laid many a lance in rest, for the renown of ladies whom knights had scarcely even looked upon at a less distance than the space dividing balcony from lists ; which caused a champion to shout in the battle a name he had never dared to whisper in the bower ; which urged George Douglas to risk life and liberty for Mary Stuart ; which bade the noblest of all the noble Cravens carry on his battered helmet the glove of Bohemia's beautiful Queen ; and which now prompted our friend Rags to visit at St. Barbs, and feast his eyes on the handsome, happy Duchess, in her own home.

He was cogitating this very matter, and how to bring it about, when his friends came boisterously in, and broke the thread of his meditations.

"We've wandered up, to smoke a weed with you, Rags, as usual," said his brother officer, seating

himself without ceremony, whilst Multiple, more polite, observed—

“They were in luck to find Mr. de Rolle at home.”

Whereupon the hospitable Cornet hallooed loudly for Belter, and that domestic appeared forthwith, armed with the three “brandies and sodas” he conceived necessarily required for the proper reception of a morning call.

Neither Multiple nor Walter felt equal to the consumption of this early stimulant, but Rags, rosy and clear-eyed, hesitated not to refresh himself with the invigorating draught. Then the three began to converse, as men will, first of their horses, secondly of other people’s horses, and lastly, of their own horses again.

“Why shouldn’t we go round and see him,” said Walter, closing the description of an animal then standing in the officers’ stables, on the sale of which, after some very successful ride, he counted to extricate him from the most pressing of his pecuniary difficulties. It occurred to him, that his friend Multiple, who seemed rich, and fond of hunting, might possibly buy at once, particularly if the owner did not appear anxious to

sell. He made a rapid calculation of the hungriest creditors whose mouths must be stopped without delay, also of the highest figure he could ask for his horse, but his face was a study of utter carelessness and imperturbability, while the three proceeded to the stable, and he added, in a tone of extreme weariness—

“Better see all the screws when we’re about it. There’s Rags, with a regular string, and Goody Two-shoes to lead their gallops for them. I’ve got a clever pony, Multiple, if that’s at all in your line. Well, if you like, we’ll go and look at Fugleman first.”

Multiple had the Stud-Book at his fingers’ ends. That and a corresponding work of reference, the Peerage, are studies of themselves; nevertheless, men can be found who have mastered both, and Walter’s friend was one of them.

“You said he was quite thorough-bred, I think,” remarked the latter. “Somehow, I don’t remember the name.”

“You remember Fenella, though,” replied Walter. “Well, he’s by Advance, out of Fenella; and Fenella, you know, was by Frantic, out of Dumb-Bell; by the Mute, out of Glide; by the

Shadow, and so up to the Phantom blood. Oh, yes, as thorough-bred as Eclipse; but he was a late foal, and they never trained him, so there he is, as fresh on his legs as a two-year-old. Six off; very quiet; can't get him down if you try; carry over fourteen stone, and a child might ride him. He's not the least my sort of horse, you know, and I *hate* him; but he's the safest mount, and honestly, the best hunter, I think, between this and Melton. Strip him."

The last sentence was addressed to a lad apparently some ten years of age, really over twenty, who could only reach Fugleman's withers by standing on a stable-bucket. Nevertheless, this abortion when once in the saddle, had the strength and nerves of a giant; could ride a steeple-chase against half the professionals, and heaped on his charge all the affection which would have been divided amongst father, mother, brothers, sisters, and friends, if he had them.

Fugleman laid his ears back, and caught the manger with his teeth, whereat Multiple hurried out of the stall in unseemly haste, not, however, till he had satisfied himself of the animal's faultless points and fine condition; then he con-

templated him from a safer position in the rear.

Fugleman was a large, handsome, grandly-shaped bay horse, with great power behind the saddle, showing unquestionable evidence of "race" in his well-turned quarters, and the setting-on of his hind legs. His shoulders were lengthy and sloping, his neck a little loose, as though he might take some riding (and this, I think, was the reason Multiple did not buy him), his head rather large and lean, with long, but fine, almost transparent ears. It was the horse's eye, though, that gave character to the whole animal, and from which could be predicted the docility, courage, and generosity of his nature. Large, dark, and brilliant, it was almost womanly in the soft, confiding expression of its glance; like a woman's, too, it seemed to seek approval and sympathy from its lord—seemed to say: "Love me, trust me, humour me but *a little*, and if I die for it, I will never fail you at your need."

Altogether, Fugleman looked like a "mount" that would give a man as good an idea of flying as he was ever likely to acquire whilst clothed in mortal form.

“Will you see him out?” asked Walter, detecting, as he thought, a glimmer of purchase in Multiple’s eye. “Will you lay your leg over him? You can canter him round the barrack-yard. He’s very quiet, and it really is a pleasure to feel such a horse as that.”

But Multiple shook his head and declined. It was not his way to jump on strange horses at a moment’s notice, and tempt his fate in unfamiliar barrack-yards. Like many others, he was a fair horseman on his own horse, with his own saddle and his own bridle, after a small glass of curaçoa, too, just to steady his nerves; but an *impromptu* gallop was a different thing altogether. He was thinking, moreover, of the noble, generous creature before him, not with regard to his mettle, pace, and powers of endurance, but his specious appearance, and the long-suffering liberality of the public—reflecting how he would like to enter him for some great steeple-chase, and make him a favourite, backing him stanchly in “ponies,” and instructing a friend in London to lay against him lavishly in hundreds, then at the last moment to lame him, or poison him, or bribe some reckless rider to pull him back forcibly at his

fences, and break both their necks rather than win.

Ah! if men were but as honest as horses, we need borrow no lantern of Diogenes, for we could see them in plenty by daylight.

"He's too good for hunting," remarked Multiple, as they walked out of Walter's stable, and the latter knew by the way he said it, that he was no purchaser. "Why don't you train him, and put him into the Great National? I haven't seen one more likely to win it this season."

"Why, Mexico has the refusal of him if we ever part," answered Walter, which was, indeed, to a certain extent true, that wealthy young nobleman having *almost* offered three hundred for this valuable animal. "Besides, I can't afford to keep horses, and get no work out of them whilst in training. I'm very poor, you know," he added, with a laugh. "Very poor, and very hard up besides."

Rags had walked on to open his stable-door, and was holding close consultation with his groom. Multiple looked after him with an odd expression, half sneer, half approval on his face. He shrugged his shoulders, and repeated—

“Hard up! and *here!* Well, it’s extraordinary to me how badly people manage their own business.”

“What do you mean?” asked Walter.

“Mean!” replied the other. “What should I mean? I thought you understood things better in the light dragoons. Why, here you have the Bank of England in the barracks, and you talk of being hard up.”

Walter stared at him for a few moments in unaffected surprise.

“I wish I knew *any* bank that would cash my bills,” said he. “Fellows talk about money being *easy*. I don’t know what they call *easy*. I’m sure I’ve always found it very hard to get, and harder still to keep.”

“Money is only a conventional term,” answered Multiple, stopping to light one of his huge cigars. “It doesn’t express a lot of sovereigns in a bag, any more than wealth is inferred by a large encumbered estate, with a title to keep up. Credit, after all, is the motive power of this great commercial country; and paper, that is *good* paper, represents property just as well as bullion.”

“You mean that a fellow can always draw a

bill," replied Walter, "and renew when he can't meet it. I don't say it's a bad plan, mind, for kite-flying on a proper system, and with a little method will keep a man afloat for years. But there's always one awkward question connected with it, who is to get up behind?"

"Young in years!" exclaimed Multiple, with mock solemnity; "but old in the tortuous labyrinths of iniquity! It is not for me to teach a child of your intelligence how the bubble is created, and the soap applied. Is not a comrade dearer (a good deal dearer to some fellows), than a brother? Is not friendship described as love without its wings? Look at that Cornet, even now awaiting our approval of his stud. Simple integrity beams in his eye, and mantles on his cheek. Fourteen stone, if he turns a pound, and exuding gold from every pore. Healthy, wealthy, and—not—wise! Surely nature has provided him for the express purpose of liquidation. Shall we milk the Ayrshire in the cow-house—the favourite at the corner—and when the bursting vessels swell appealingly under the cunning hand, draw back, mock modest, and forbear to fill the pail? I tell you the name of De Rolle is as good as Roths-

child. Rags is your friend, and Rags stinks of money. A bill at three months is convertible at a trifling discount, and I am wasting my breath and spoiling my cigar, for Walter Brooke knows all this as well as Frank Multiple, who has been studying the interest tables and the money market ever since he was three years old."

Walter laughed. "Work the Jews first," said he carelessly, "and then come to the Christians. By the way, Multiple, you must dine here with Rags next week, instead of me. It's all the same, old fellow, and you won't be offended; but I've promised to go to St. Barbs for a day or two, and it depends on what hunting there is how soon I get back. Rags will take excellent care of you, and be delighted. Let us go and look at his horses. If he could ride her, Goody Two-shoes is the best he's got."

The speaker did not seem inclined to resume the money question, and Multiple, who cared but little for horses out of which no profit could be made, soon excused himself, and retired for the rest of the evening to his inn.

Walter Brooke had been some few years embarked in life, and was now beginning to feel the

pressure that a good position, a liberal outfit, and a fair start, stave off for a time. Though the effects were sufficiently pleasant while they lasted, it was, perhaps, a misfortune to Walter that his person and manners were of that kind which is most appreciated in London society. He was handsome in a manly and even remarkable style, without being the least *a tiger*. He was always quiet, undemonstrative, and with his wits about him; unflurried by success, and perfectly callous to the frankest rebuff. He had the knack of knowing people's carriages and horses at a vast distance, and remembered all their different relatives by marriage and otherwise. That is to say, people about whom it was worth his while to be interested. When in London, he was sure to have the latest news, which he neither trumpeted in your ears nor threw contemptuously at your head, but told in a quiet, confidential, matter-of-course way, with a touch of humour, and a strong dash of sarcasm. He was popular everywhere, and usually seemed to consider himself a little too good for his company, whatever it might be. No doubt, had he lived earlier in the century, he must have achieved fame.

Why the women liked him, it is, of course, impossible for me to explain. I have seen so many men utterly different in every particular, without and within, yet all first favourites with the sex, that I am puzzled to define the qualities of mind or body that are most apt in the allurements of their good graces. They certainly look kindly on manly comeliness, yet, heavens! what ugly fellows have we not all envied riding triumphant in the lists of Love. They like clever men, so they say; yet I find it conceded by a majority, that a fool is the best material for a husband. They profess to admire eloquence and to delight in being amused; nevertheless, with their own charming flow of language, I should feel inclined to back the listener against the talker in the long run. Perhaps it is as well that their predilections should defy calculation. My own belief is that they are most susceptible to romantic devotion, when expressed by ease of manner, willingness to oblige, and a never-failing facility in acts of practical attention. A limited younger brother's allowance, even added to a subaltern's pay, is soon consumed in the boots, gloves, blacking, eau de Cologne, and hack-cabs of a London summer,

leaving little margin for those infamous ready-money transactions called water parties, and none whatever for tailors' bills, keep of horses, purchase of carriages, stalls at the opera, cigars, bouquets, and other the mere necessities of life. Two or three "good things" at Epsom and Ascot, with one extraordinary "fluke" at Newmarket, did, indeed, keep Walter's head above water longer than he had any right to expect, and brother Jack, too, had helped him, out of his own small pittance, as far as he was able; but in the affairs of men, as in those of nature, you cannot have the flood-tide without the ebb, and here was Walter, at last, left high and dry upon the strand.

He was literally in want of two or three sovereigns to pay for moving his horses to St. Barbs, and for pocket-money during his visit at the Duke's. Of course, he never dreamed of giving up the visit; the natural proceeding was to obtain the sovereigns.

He was to dine *tête-à-tête* with Rags, at the barracks, and went to dress rather early, sending his servant down to a law-stationer's shop in the town, before it closed.

The two brother officers had a cosy, pleasant

little dinner, by a good fire. Their wine was perfection, and they drank as if they liked it. Rags talked incessantly about the Duchess of Merthyr-Tydvil, and hinted, clumsily enough, at his desire for an invitation to the forthcoming gathering at St. Barbs.

“The Duke is sure to ask you,” observed Walter, carelessly, while he filled his glass with claret, and turned his chair towards the fire. “The Duke never misses a fellow who seems fond of hunting, particularly if he can ride a bit. Let me see. He meets at Oakover, on Friday, in his best country. You can reach it from here, if you send the horses by train. I suppose you’ll ride Goody Two-shoes, and make an example of us all if you get a start.”

The other’s eyes glistened. He *did* so enjoy being patted on the back, particularly by Walter, from whom he seldom received this encouragement, but who was exceedingly gracious to-night. Rags had mentioned the Duchess’s name a score of times during dinner already, now he brought it in again—

“Why, you see, when I danced with the Duchess that night, she asked me a good deal about hunt-

ing, and she *did* say something about the country near St. Barbs, and I thought two or three times she was going to invite me there. I suppose she had to ask *him* first. I say, Walter, I should like to know the Duke !”

“He’s as good a fellow as the Duchess,” replied Walter, with a familiarity that somewhat shocked Rags, who winced at his divinity being thus rudely approached. “Let me see, Rags (I think we could do another bottle of this claret, old fellow); I don’t know but what I could manage it for you. The Duke was a light dragoon himself once, and he likes soldiers better than civilians still.”

Rags rang the bell willingly. He appreciated claret—a taste in which I perfectly agree with him. Nor am I sure but that when the wine is sound, the second bottle goes down even more pleasantly than the first. Then he exclaimed, in a voice of deep feeling—

“Walter, you’re a real brick! Here’s your health !”

The second bottle waned rapidly. By the time it was finished and the cigars alight, both young men were slightly influenced by its qualities.

That is to say, Walter's scruples had vanished, if, indeed, he owned any; and Rags, who was always a good fellow, felt twice as good a fellow now as ever.

"Shall you let Lord Mexico have Fugleman?" asked Rags, winking and glowing, so to speak, with enjoyment, over the red end of his cigar. "He'd jump at him for three hundred, I believe!"

"He's worth more than that," answered Walter, thoughtfully. "I don't like to sell him, and yet, altogether, I'm rather in a mess about my horses. I don't even know whether I shall be able to get to St. Barbs, after all."

Rags looked blank.

"What? Is the grey lame again?" said he, with much commiseration. "Never mind, old chap, that needn't stop you. Take two of mine!"

To be called "old chap" by an individual of whose intellectual powers you have conceived the lowest possible opinion, and whose familiarity you feel less the offspring of friendship than Bordeaux, even when that individual backs the endearing appellation by offering you the pick of his stud, is doubtless an aggravation. You must have good and weighty reasons to bear it placidly.

Walter's tone was calm and confidential, while he thanked him for his proposal.

"I've plenty of horses," said he, "so it is not *that*. The fact is, old fellow, I've bled the governor so freely of late, he hasn't got a drop of the vital fluid left. I don't like to borrow of the Jews, when it's only a question of a month or two, at fifty per cent. I can get all I want on a bill with another fellow's name across it, which is, after all, a mere matter of form, for, of course, its *my* bill, and I'm answerable for it. What I require is a mere trifle. Only two or, say, three hundred, just to keep me going till the spring. Why, my book on the National's worth twice the money now. Then I take up the bill, cancel the acceptance, and nobody's a bit the wiser. I'd have asked Jack to do it, of course, if I'd seen him to-day; but Jack's the most horrible funkier when he's off a horse; and though he'd have done it, he'd have jawed for an hour first. After all, a brother officer is the next thing to a brother, and you and I have pulled together now for some time. Look here! Rags, it would be a convenience to me if you could lend me your name—only your *name*, you understand—for the next twelve weeks. Let

me see. The hunting season's nearly over already. Well, certainly for not more than three months; purely and entirely as a matter of form!"

Rags didn't like it. Rags hesitated. He was a generous fellow enough, even about money, though he preferred giving things away in kind, inheriting from both sides of his family a proper respect for the circulating medium, and he would rather have helped Walter, particularly just now, than anybody else in the world. Still he didn't like it! He made a face like a child taking physic, and Walter observing this reluctance, immediately withdrew his request.

"If you've any superstition about it, old fellow," said he, good-naturedly, "I'll try some one else. Lots of people will be glad to accommodate me without risk, only I'd rather be under obligation to *you*, because we're so much together, and I might be useful to you in return. You're not offended at being asked, old boy, at any rate, I hope?"

This was too much for Rags. Offended! and by Walter—his friend, his pattern, his passport to St. Barbs; and here he was, refusing this good fellow the most trifling accommodation, devoid of

inconvenience or hazard. He made up his mind in a moment.

"There's no risk, you say?" he inquired, looking thoughtfully into the coals.

"Not the slightest!" answered Walter. "How *can* there be? It's *my* bill, not yours."

"And for how much?" added Rags, struggling sorely between generosity and a constitutional dislike to committing himself.

"Three hundred!" answered the borrower, point-blank, adding, "We won't make it a monkey this time, Rags, for fear of frightening you."

"Get the inkstand!" exclaimed the other, flinging the remains of his cigar desperately beneath the grate. "I hate business. Let's do it at once!"

So Walter sent to his room for his writing-case, and produced a piece of paper, and wrote out the bill in due form, with a rapidity and precision that argued experience in such matters; and showed Rags exactly where to affix his signature, impressing on him carefully the whole time, that he was incurring not the slightest risk, and indeed a merely nominal liability. After which performance, they smoked one more cigar, in great good-

humour and harmony, retiring to rest early, as they called it, about one, a.m.

When they bade each other "Good-night," Rags looked very wise, as if a sudden light had struck in on him. "By Jove, Walter, I don't believe we drew that bill on stamped paper!"

"Oh yes! we did," replied Walter, "I happened to have some 'stiff' in my room." But he wondered at his friend's viridity, and caught himself laughing at it more than once before he went to sleep.



CHAPTER III.

CARRYING ON.

LONDON, out of the season, is no doubt a gay and bustling place to those who live in it, but to come from the country, on a soft rainy morning in spring, say a week or two after Valentine's Day, and splash through the muddy streets, with a wet blanket of murky clouds close down upon the chimney-pots overhead, and a sea of liquid mire under foot, is perhaps one of the most depressing performances, short of actual misfortune, to which a man can be subjected in a Christian land and a civilized community.

That it becomes tolerable, and even enlivening, when combined with the borrowing of money for short periods, at a high rate of interest, is one of

those beautiful contradictions in human nature, for which we are unable to account ; but it is a singular feature in the idiosyncrasy of mankind, particularly during the elasticity of its third decade, that pecuniary pressure should produce, probably from recoil, a high flow of spirits, and a general state of imperturbable good-humour.

Perhaps there is some truth in the witty Lord Alvanley's precept, that it would be hard, if because a man wanted money, he should therefore want everything else. Perhaps all difficulties are good for us, and therefore it is that we make so many for ourselves.

In one of those quiet streets, within reach of the clubs, the parks, the public offices, and the Strand, there stands a large, well-built, dirty dwelling, from the exterior of which you would infer that it was a roomy and commodious family mansion, with a good deal of substantial furniture running to seed, and housemaids sadly neglectful of their duty. Passing it often, which curiosity alone would prompt you to do, for it is in a retired and little frequented thoroughfare, you would wonder why you neither saw livery-servants at the door, nor the slightest appearance of life below-

stairs in the area. Being further informed that it did *not* belong to a dentist, you would forthwith give up guessing at the manners, habits, and social station of the proprietor. The house would become a mystery to you, and might remain so, though you passed it every day during the term of your natural life.

For the London cabman, however, there is no such thing as a mystery. Though you come across a stupid driver every now and then, when you are in an unusual hurry, taken as a body, I believe this fraternity to possess more general information than any class on earth. Mark their philosophical composure under trying circumstances, such as collisions, upsets, and fatal accidents; observe their tranquil recognition of merit, their lofty indifference to evil, their utter callousness to surprise; their self-reliance, their powers of sarcasm, their eloquence in denunciation or repartee. Like the men you meet going to and from races, but never see on the course or elsewhere; they are a class by themselves—how raised, how formed, how educated, I have not sufficient statistical research to explain.

One of these peripatetic philosophers, then, was

sitting on the box of his hansom, at the door of the house I have endeavoured to describe, accepting the rain that fell continuously with a resignation highly creditable in the conductor of a vehicle, which, unlike the "four-wheeler," makes its hay avowedly while the sun shines. His horse showing a good deal of well-shaped anatomy, sinking its lean, handsome head, and resting, as far as possible, the most ailing of its limbs, slept with great composure. The pressure of the carriage had been taken off its back. Obviously the fare was paying a protracted visit, and the driver waited with the patience of a man who is earning money the whole time he is doing nothing.

He did not seem to puzzle his brains with vague speculations as to the house before which he had stopped more than an hour ago. Did this careless demeanour, enhanced by his professional method of chewing a straw, spring from a superiority of knowledge, or indifference to results? My own opinion is, that he was thoroughly conversant with the character of the mansion and its inmates; that he had learnt their trade, their liabilities, their customers; that he knew as well as Walter Brooke himself, whom he had brought here from the sta-

tion, why his business should take so long to negotiate, and what obstacles to its termination arose, from that officer's consistent refusal to accept wine, pictures, the lease of a house in Camberwell, or a share in a promising two-year-old, then at Stockbridge, in lieu of any part of the coin for which he had come.

He was not the least surprised, this well-informed cabman, when a large, square, grey-haired man, looking the very impersonation of respectability, bowed Walter to the door, and stood in the gloomy hall, rubbing his hands as if he were washing them, with an action peculiar to people whose avocations oblige them to handle dirty work, metaphorical or real.

The large man conversed affably, but in a tone of fatherly interest, and even remonstrance. He was, apparently, still urging on Walter "Something to his advantage." "No such sherry to be got, Captain," said he benevolently, "out of the country itself. Our correspondent obtains it as a personal favour, and forwards it direct. Young men ruin their stomachs with inferior sherry. Think of it, Captain. I may not have such a chance to offer you again."

“My good sir,” replied Walter, “*do* you suppose I can afford to *buy* sherry? What do you think I came here for?”

“Well, well,” said the other, laughing over his limp white neck-cloth, “We are always ready to accommodate—always ready to accommodate. I have incurred more responsibility than I like in transacting our business without reference to my partner, but it was to oblige you, Captain—to oblige you. The picture I think you are right to decline, having no permanent residence, though such a picture as that, sir, is a bank-note in a frame. With regard to the lease, I might afford to buy it back from you at an increased price in six weeks from this time. I really think you should take the lease! It’s worth more and more every day.”

“Then why the devil do you want to sell it?” asked Walter, not unnaturally, putting on his gloves the while, and by this time driven to the door-step.

“We make things dove-tail, to suit each other, in our business,” was the reply; “and I should like to put you in the way of a good thing, I confess, Captain, for my own satisfaction—that is why I confided to you the merits of my partner’s young

one. You won't breathe a syllable, of course. I believe hatsful of money are to be made out of that horse for the Derby after next. Your share would be worth your troop to you by that time, Captain, whether he won or lost. You understand me. The truth is, my partner's a deal too fond of racing. It doesn't look well for men of business, Captain, and I wish I could wean him from it."

"I always hear about your *partner*," said Walter, buttoning his coat with a satisfied air, like a man who has got something inside. "Why do I never see him? I cannot imagine he is such an impracticable lender, and such a screw about discount, as you make out."

The other smiled blandly, and went on washing his hands.

"My partner's time is much engaged," said he. "At present, I believe he is on business of his own somewhere in the country. He will think my terms too liberal, I fear, Captain, when we audit our accounts; but I am proud to have been able to accommodate you even at a personal sacrifice. Good morning—*good* morning, Captain. You will bear in mind, if you please, not to mention the two-year old."

The square, grey-haired man made one more farewell bow, and closed his own door softly and placidly, while Walter shut down that of the hansom with a bang. Then giving his orders to the imperturbable cabman with a smiling face, for he was in high spirits, he congratulated himself on the past interview and the success of his late enterprise.

Let us see what was the amount of gain he contemplated with such lively satisfaction.

In the first place, he had laid himself under an obligation to a friend, which might or might not prove a source of future inconvenience, but on this point it is right to observe he troubled himself but little. Rags was a good fellow, and it would all come right: so there was an end of that matter. In the next, he had engaged to pay up three hundred pounds of hard money within three months' time. Was it more likely he could meet such a demand at the expiration of that period than now? Well, he thought it was! Events would then have come off which might put him in funds, and, if worst came to worst, he must let that muff Mexico have poor Fugleman. For these liabilities, over how much had he

buttoned his pocket to carry on the war? He had fought hard for his spoil, and had avoided, only by dint of persistent resolution, the ownership of five dozen of bad wine, an anatomical daub, ill-drawn and worse coloured; the lease of a tumble-down house; and an indefinite share, with three or four black-legs, in a problematical race-horse. Waiving all claim to these personalities, he had struggled, shilling by shilling, for the discount, and found himself, at the close of his interview with Mr. Pounder, for that was the money-lender's name, in possession of four fifty pound notes, as many tens, a few fives, eleven sovereigns, and three half-crowns. This sum would keep him afloat for some weeks, at any rate. He would go triumphantly to St. Barbs. He would have a rare ride on Fugleman tomorrow. There was sure to be a scent after the rain, and Oakover was the best covert in the country. Walter placed great reliance on the Future. His faith was fixed, though indefinite, in that blind Goddess, who certainly gives her aid most freely to those who trust implicitly in her guidance.

Life seemed well worth having after all.

Though the cabman, in letting down the glasses, knocked its hat over its eyes, the fare neither stamped nor swore, and did not leave London without buying a cardcase for Helen, a pair of lazy-tongs for the Squire, and a cheap tobacco-stopper for Jack.

He was soon back at the railway station, and in direct infringement of the company's by-laws, tendering half-a-crown to the guard of the train on the understanding that this incorruptible functionary should reserve a carriage expressly for himself and his friends.

I think I have observed of late years that young men travel with more impediments in the way of luggage, than was the practice long ago in the days of my youth. I have seen, in that primeval age, a rampant dandy of his time making the transit from London to Doncaster outside the mail, which, by the way, he drove, or *worked*, as we used to call it, fully half the distance, with no more superfluities than a shawl-handkerchief; no more necessaries than a sherry-flask, and a cigar-case the size of a portmanteau. But to-day they seem to have advanced a whole century in matters of comfort and convenience. The modern traveller

who takes a first-class ticket requires as many luxuries as an Eastern potentate. In addition to railway rugs and wrappers of every description, he must be further encumbered by a faggot of sticks and umbrellas, securely strapped together like the bundle in the fable, by an embroidered cap, a travelling lamp, an uncut novel, a paper-knife, *The Times* (with supplement), the *Globe*, a sporting paper, and the *Saturday Review* ; nor can any of these extras apparently be crammed into a large leathern reticule, with a pocket in its stomach like a female kangaroo, already stuffed with writing materials, cigar cases, eau de Cologne, hair brushes, and, as I am informed, all the materials for an elaborate toilet.

Each of Walter's three friends possessed the paraphernalia pertaining to his station. There was but little room in their "engaged" compartment for the half-dozen new packs of cards, without which it was impossible to travel over a score of miles. These lively young gentleman were going down to join the hunting-party at St. Barbs, and had arranged to dine with Walter at the barracks ; and then catch a late train on a branch line, which would bring them to the Duke's

about midnight. The day would be thus passed in change of scene and excitement. There remained but the period occupied by their journey from London to Middlesworth. This blank, it had been decided, could be agreeably filled up with whist.

The party consisted of Viscount Mexico, an exceedingly rich and uninteresting Peer, supposed to be somewhat deficient in brains, but well known at Eton, Oxford, and subsequently in London, as sufficiently careful of his own interests, and not too stupid to play a remarkably good rubber; or to square accounts with his agent scrupulously once a month, whereby the family property, little damaged by a shamefully inadequate settlement on his Lordship's mother, did by no means deteriorate under his administration. This young nobleman was very properly the great gun of the party.

The other two, of smaller bore, so to speak, and inferior calibre, were as well known in London as Northumberland House or the Duke of York's Column. Captain Belt of the Life Guards, christened Augustus, but known in the regiment as Tom, was a fair specimen of a class that delights

to throw away its advantages, and waste its energies on frivolous pursuits, for which it cares nothing at heart. Tom Belt, with courage, good humour, good health, and good abilities, was satisfied, or I should say resigned, to pass his days in the narrowest possible circle, even of those amusements for which he seemed to live. To shoot pigeons at Hornsey, to lose glove-bets at Ascot, to be well dressed, and ride a neat hack in the Park—these were the aims and endeavours of his existence. He had talents of which he was scarcely conscious, for he had never cultivated them. He had affections, frittered away on a hundred different objects, of which he preferred the most unworthy. He had a large estate which he neglected; but, fortunately for him, an agent, who allowed no “pickings” but his own. He had all the accessories that go to form a man of influence in his generation, and what was the result? Tom Belt, with his cheery manner, his pleasant smile, his good set of teeth, had the reputation of being not quite an idiot, only because he could play a fair rubber at whist!

How many men there are about London completely thrown away from sheer want of a plunge

into cold water ; who, when braced up by danger, difficulty, or affliction, prove themselves capable of great things ; and who, even in the natural and tranquil course of events, do sometimes get tired of frivolity at middle-age, and turn to the real working purposes of life. Perhaps, if they *will* do nothing but waste their time till they are ruined, the best thing for them is to get rid of their money as fast as they can. Yet it does seem a pity to lose all the golden years of youth, all the resources and advantages of wealth, because people persist in making a business of pleasure, thereby losing the exquisite flavour afforded by the one, as well as the substantial food comprised in the other.

Tom Belt might well be called one of the drones in the hive. Not so little Champignon, sitting on the opposite seat, and presenting Lord Mexico with a paper cigarette of undeniable quality, imported direct from Madrid, as he assures his Lordship, who, possibly in complete ignorance of that capital, seems but little impressed with the fact.

Champignon has worked hard all his life. Nobody knows who he is—nobody thinks of asking.

From some men society requires that they should bring their credentials in their hand ; others it accepts, as we accept the swallows in the spring, without troubling ourselves where they come from.

Champignon's name is French ; his low stature, olive complexion, and dark, piercing eyes, argue a Spanish origin ; but when he opens his lips, you are satisfied that English is his mother-tongue. There is a tradition that he speaks many continental languages like a native. Possibly he may ; but there is no mistake about his English ; and no foreigner, I think, however great his proficiency, ever yet succeeded in deceiving our national ear. There is also a superstition that he is connected in some mysterious manner with the Government, and this indefinite link seems unaffected by a change of Ministry. Also, he disappears suddenly on occasion, even in the middle of the season, for weeks at a time. Vague rumours then arise that he is engaged in important political missions at foreign capitals. On his return, invitations to dinner pour in without number, and his admirers become more infatuated than ever to observe, as he takes care they shall, that he is hand-and-glove with every *attaché* in

London, and that ambassadors themselves clap him on the shoulder, and call him *Mon cher* in the Park.

The little man loses nothing, depend upon it, by being a secret from the crown of his French hat to the tips of his nice boots. Nobody knows what he does with himself all the morning, or why he is regularly seen by his acquaintance, which means every one in London, yet never twice by the same person, in the afternoon. Nobody knows whether he lives at the address on his cards, or where he dines when not engaged to one of his noble friends, or why people so often miss him at those great parties in the lists of which his name invariably appears next day. Nobody knows if he is, or is not, connected with several daily, and one weekly paper; or why he is half-an-hour in advance of the world regarding telegrams, official news, horrible accidents, and domestic scandal. He himself knows everything—where you can get unadulterated sherry; who was the first person to throw himself off the Monument, and where he fell; why Lady Macalmmore's hair all came down at the Caledonian ball; how she sent her maid away, and where

the maid is gone. Ere he has been twelve hours at St. Barbs, he will tell the Duchess of Merthyr-Tydvil of a shop for cleaning old lace in the Barbican, and what to give her love-birds for the gapes. He will warn the Duke of a certain favourite likely to be "made safe" for the Two Thousand; and he will show the land-agent a diagram of a new subsoil plough. Lady Julia calls him "The Pocket Companion and Universal Referee." Perhaps, if obliged to go out, he will enjoy his day's hunting less than any other country amusement; but he will ask his host honestly to put him on a quiet horse, and will get through even this ordeal quietly and creditably enough.

In appearance he is not prepossessing, but he looks what he is—a hard and wiry man, though small. He speaks little, notwithstanding his amount of information, and drinks less; but he smokes cigarettes from morning till night, and makes a fair annual income by his skill in the noble game of whist.

The train has panted out of the station; cleared off a few short white puffs of smoke, as though to bring its lungs into play; indulged in a strange, shrill

shriek, like a wild cry of freedom from some living monster, and is fairly settled to its work, thirty miles an hour, over the beautiful pastoral country that lies to the north of London. There is a forty-shilling penalty for smoking, wisely advertised in each carriage, to enhance the forbidden pleasure of a cigar. It is needless to say that three of these, and a cigarette, are already in full process of consumption. The fellow-travellers talk a little, read a little, find the latter an unpleasant process, and somebody says something about "whist."

"The very thing!" observes Tom Belt, turning from the window, out of which he has been scanning the country, searching, I imagine, for the easy places in the fences, and thinking how tempting they look to ride over — "the very thing. Play all the way down; make the time pass. Not too high, I vote. What say you, Brooke? Quiet rubber in the old form; pound points?"

"Pounds and fives," answered Walter, carelessly, strong in the possession of ready money; "or ponies, if you like it better. I don't care. Bet what you please."

The hussar was a proficient in the game—perhaps one of the best in London, for his years. Its intricacies suited his turn of mind, and he had made many a welcome hundred by the self-taught habit of remembering every card as it came out. He felt now that he was a turn better than any of his company; for of the other three, though sound average players, Champignon could alone be considered even second-rate. The higher the stakes, therefore, the more profitably, he thought, could he employ his time. Why, he might win enough in a couple of hours to take him well over the next three months; and something seemed to tell him he was in a run of luck just now. So he shuffled the cards, and cut Champignon for a partner, with very decided anticipations of success.

They won the first game triumphantly. Honours divided. Cards pretty equal; but Tom Belt, possibly unused to whist at the rate of thirty miles an hour, committed an egregious blunder, and Mexico might have made more of his diamonds. "Play must tell," thought Walter, as he prepared to deal; and he laid the life guardsman thirty pounds to twenty, with considerable *sang froid*.

The next was not so prosperous. The adversaries' cards were of a nature to override any amount of play, and the inferior performers, as Mexico pleasantly observed, "had it all their own way from first to last, and won in a canter."

Fortune will sometimes take the entire management even of such games as whist, in which skill shares so largely with chance. Walter lost the first rubber, though with so good a partner as Champignon. It was discouraging, after this, to have lee-way to make up by the inferior aid of Tom Belt.

Mexico had quite sense enough to know when he was in "a good thing." While the train stopped for a minute-and-a-half to take in water, he made the cards, and looked from one adversary to the other.

"Fifty with each on the rubber?" he asked, adding lazily, "what a row that fellow makes with his bell!"

Tom Belt declined. "I'll have a pony with you, if you like; but I think you're rather strong for us."

"I'll take the other seventy-five!" exclaimed Walter eagerly. He had that strange prescience

of success which no gambler ever should or *can* resist, though it leads him eventually to ruin.

They won it. They carried everything before them. Picture-cards came tumbling into their hands by threes and fours; small trumps were valueless, and despised. Success! a bumper! All the honours! The rubber resembled a regimental dinner in every respect, save that it was sooner over; and Walter, nearly a hundred to the good, felt that he was in the vein, and would not disappoint his luck.

But it was this very success that led eventually to his discomfiture. In the transit from London to Middlesworth there was time for three rubbers, hardly for four. Nevertheless, one of these had been so quickly played out, that after losing on the next, Walter himself proposed a fourth at still higher stakes, when he found himself once more with the best of the three players for a partner.

Meanwhile the train went gliding on, leaving behind it many a lordly hall, and wooded hill, and lovely glimpse of English meadow scenery; passing bare sky-lines of chalky downs, and wide flats of rich, dark soil, and here a mill-wheel

silent in the hollow, and there a gleam of some quiet brook, with pollard willows growing on its banks, until presently the fields became larger, the cattle more numerous, the hedges thicker, blacker, and less frequent; the character of the country, now less arable than pastoral, assumed a freer, wilder aspect, suggestive of galloping, and the train, punctual to its time, ran into Middlesworth Station before our friends had come near the conclusion of their rubber.

“Mill’s’orth ! Mill’s’orth ! Mill’s’orth !” shouted a porter, in the easy tone affected by these functionaries all over Europe, which prevents the possibility of your learning the name of a station unless you knew it before. “All out here, if you please, Captain,” added the man, opening the door of the compartment in which the four whist players were absorbed in their game, addressing himself to Walter, whom he knew, and who had given him many a shilling.

“Go to the devil !” answered the hussar, intent upon a certain knave, whose ambush he strongly suspected. “What do you come jawing here for ? You’re not a first-class passenger !”

“Beg your pardon, sir,” said the man, grinning,

“train don’t go any further, sir; carriage has to be shunted.”

“Shunt and be hanged!” replied Walter. “Here! you sir! Run up to the barracks, and tell them to put dinner off for half an hour. Ask the station-master, with my compliments, to have us shunted to a siding, with as little shaking as possible, and put the danger signal on if there’s another train due. They know me here. Mexico, it’s your deal!”

So the four gentlemen were quickly shunted off the line of traffic, and finished their rubber in great comfort and dignity. Its results, however, were unfortunate for Walter. To Mexico and Belt he lost nearly all the proceeds of his morning’s transaction with Mr. Pounder, besides half-a-crown for the messenger he sent to the barracks, and a sovereign amongst the porters who moved the carriage for his convenience. Altogether, he did not return five pounds richer than he went, and his groom’s book, well he knew, would make a sad hole in this small capital.

It was a pity, you see, that his friends, like himself, belonged to a club, of which the members pay their losses at whist in ready money.

Otherwise the debt might have stood over with a good many others. He began to wish now that he had taken the sherry, the picture, or even a share in the two-year-old horse. These could not have melted so rapidly. It was hard to decide what should be done next.

Well, it was no use thinking of it in the mean time. Walter was never better company in his life than presiding over the hasty dinner he gave his guests in the barracks. He joked about the hardships of campaigning; apologized for what he called Her Majesty's rations; while he helped them to turtle from Paynter's, and pledged them in dry champagne, at ninety-six shillings a dozen. He had the faculty, enviable in some respects, but which leads a man too often into fresh difficulties, of throwing off all care and anxiety for a time; of abstracting his mind completely from every subject of future annoyance so long as a sip of pleasure could be extracted from the present hour; and of putting off his sorrows, as he did his debts, to be liquidated hereafter, with interest added to capital.

He was so accustomed to difficulties too, though of late they had been accumulating faster than

usual, that he had acquired great readiness of resource in pecuniary embarrassment, and a rapid perception of expedients, which, like the *coup d'œil* of a skilful general, seized the remedy almost at the instant of disaster. Even now, laughing gaily over his champagne, and talking of the anticipated sport to-morrow, he had made up his mind that Fugleman must leave his own stable for Mexico's at three hundred. One bold ride, he felt sure, would instigate that nobleman to purchase; for the Viscount, like many others, was apt to forget that a horse carries some men a good deal better than others. "Yes," he thought, "keep this ass in good humour, and sell him my poor horse. Buy something else to finish the season with, and then come the Spring meetings, with a hundred or so to come and go upon, and all the opportunities of turning them that an industrious man can find or make for himself in the ring.—Mexico, try another glass of that champagne."

His Lordship was in unusual spirits. He liked winning money—he liked a good dinner at another man's expense. He was even well satisfied with his company, for Brooke made himself unusually

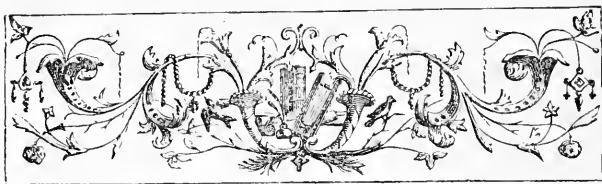
agreeable, and Rags listened to him with a deference, to which, amongst his own friends, he was totally unaccustomed.

The latter was a little disappointed that he had as yet received no invitation to St. Barbs, though he hardly expected Walter to bring him one from London in his pocket. But his genial nature soon recovered this trifling drawback, and, as was usually the case, he enjoyed himself without stint or scruple. Given, two or three good-humoured fellows, and tolerable wine, it would not have been Rags had he failed to fall in with the jovial humour of the hour.

Time passes rapidly with such a party when engaged in the consumption of an excellent dinner, free from restraint or ceremony. Mexico prosed a good deal about his keepers, and his pheasants, and a certain system of rearing the latter, which he seemed to think nobody else understood. Nevertheless, though he drank freely, he preserved his wits, such as they were, carefully enough. Coarse, heavy, and unimaginative, his was the kind of nature on which wine takes but little effect. While Tom Belt talked himself into a high state of excitement on every subject

broached, the Viscount never showed the slightest spark of animation but once, and that was when somebody contradicted him. Then he turned angry and unpleasant, till Walter, with considerable tact, diverted the conversation into a more agreeable channel. There was not much time to spare. The train that should bring the party within a five-mile drive of St. Barbs, left Middlesworth at nine, p.m.; nevertheless, before the moment of departure arrived, Tom Belt sang an English, and Champignon a French song, both, I am bound to admit, of an Anacreontic character, tending to the subversion of morals, and the encouragement of inebriety.

Altogether, though he felt a little low when they left him, and the barracks looked rather dreary, emptied of its guests, Rags enjoyed his evening considerably, and went to bed in a hopeful frame of mind, anticipating great things from the sport of to-morrow.



CHAPTER IV.

TOO MUCH SAIL.



HERE is one advantage among many possessed by the man who seeks his excitement in the hunting-field, for which he is by no means sufficiently grateful, and which tends much to enhance the enjoyment of his beloved pastime. It is the favourable, and perhaps abnormal, view his tastes lead him to adopt of the weather. People who are not given to hunting think him mad, when coming down to breakfast on a dark, damp, dismal day, that imparts to everything a gloomy aspect, no less than a raw, cold touch, he exclaims, exultingly, "What a *charming* morning!" In vain they point out that the earth is saturated with wet; the wind in the east; that not only do their

own meteorological sensations, such as rheumatism, lumbago, and chronic neuralgia, insist on the propriety of remaining indoors, but that the glass has risen half an inch since last night, denoting the probability of frost, though the sky looks so like snow. The infatuated votary of Diana but rubs his hands more gleefully, and goes gallantly in for an additional chop, while he denies himself a second cup of tea. Presently he is seen picking his way to the stables in search of his hack, to gallop off, cheerful, radiant, full of spirits, the only thing out of doors, animate or inanimate, that does not look disgusted with the state of the atmosphere.

It is, however, less with the feelings of the rider than the horse that I am now concerned. The horse—whose instinct so nearly approaches reason; whose generous courage refuses to acknowledge defeat; whose character and temperament are the noblest of the whole animal creation.

Goody Two-shoes, stepping daintily through the deep, poached clay of a narrow gateway, into a yellow, rushy pasture, the surface of which is only varied by a couple of magpies and a stunted thorn, knows perfectly well why she has been

brought out of her warm stable soon after dawn ; why she has been fed an hour earlier than usual, and forbidden to quench her thirst freely from the well-known pail ; why a horse-box on the railway has been appropriated to the use of herself and her stable-companion, for whom she manifests unfounded dislike, and a strong inclination to injurious dealings by teeth and hoofs. Lastly, why, after all the alarming joltings and deafening noises incidental to steam conveyance, she has been brought five miles at a foot's pace, with an extraordinary degree of caution, by the smart little groom now perched on her back, and who has ridden her some distance in advance of his fellow-servant, because, to use his own words, "Goody, she do fight and worritt so bad, along o' company."

She is a picture standing there, with her handsome head up, her delicate ears pointed, and a scarlet spot in her nostril, as she spreads it wide, and seems to watch with the three senses, of sight, hearing, and smell, for the approach of her maddening friends—the hounds. Dearly she loves them, though with a wild unreasoning, and essentially feminine attachment. Her fine organ-

ization vibrates to their music ; her reckless courage rises at their sight. In their company what feat of daring will she not attempt ? kept back from them, who can rule her so skilfully but that she will prove a wild-cat, a vixen, and a shrew ? The beautiful, brown, thorough-bred mare, is all afire with excitement ; even now, though not a red coat has yet added its patch of colour to the dim, grey landscape, not even a groom, slow, steady, and careful, with his master's favourite, has yet arrived, except her own.

That wise little functionary dismounts in the driest spot he can find, a very miry one, nevertheless, and proceeds with a blue cotton handkerchief to remove the specks of mud from bit, stirrups, saddle-flaps : nay, even in a measure, from the mare herself. Then he takes the curb-chain up a link, the girths a hole ; adjusting saddle and bridle with experienced nicety. Meanwhile, Goody Two-shoes winces, kicks, and makes believe to bite. The happy hour is approaching, and she is fit to jump out of her skin from positive delight.

Presently, the glance of her eye, the quiver of her ear denote that she has caught the hoof-tramp of a horse ; soon her stable-companion, ac-

accompanied by two more hunters, with their dark-coated, neatly booted grooms, makes his appearance; then from another direction, a farmer on a four-year-old approaches at a trot, whilst a cheery laugh, and the slam of a gate behind a neighbouring coppice, denote that the plot is already thickening, and the first scene about to commence. Were she of meaner race, Goody would neigh aloud for joy, but she contents herself with a prolonged snort instead, and bending her graceful neck, plays a perfect tune on her ringing bridle in sheer gaiety of heart.

Again the eager head goes up. She stands now erect and motionless, save for a ripple of the quivering muscles under her satin skin. Half a mile off, and invisible as yet to eyes unsharpened by excitement, three black caps are bobbing slowly along the far side of a ragged winter hedge; three red coats glance at intervals through its interstices, ere a white dot or two straggle round the corner of the fence into an adjoining field, and the crack of a heavy hunting whip dwells like a pistol shot on the still, dense atmosphere. Nor is this all. A few early gentlemen, who having had a long distance to ride, are therefore before their time,

come galloping up on their covert hacks; and the equanimity of Goody Two-shoes is fairly upset for the rest of the day.

By the time the huntsman and his hounds have trotted quietly into the field appointed for the place of meeting, more grooms, more hunters, more sportsmen, on galloping hacks, turn up. A keeper in velveteen, with a double-barrelled gun under his arm, rises from some mysterious ambush, and enters at once into confidential relations with the first whip.

A dog-cart next arrives, driven by a gentleman who seems to have missed his horse, and whom the nature of the soil precludes from an attempt to leave the lane on wheels. Other carriages, containing ladies well wrapped up, remain on the hard and friendly highway. A chestnut horse with a white leg and a side-saddle appears from behind an outhouse in the corner of the field; a boy on a pony surveys the whole gathering calm and unconcerned, as boys always are in these days, without ever winking once. The meet at Oakover is in the act of taking place, as advertised.

There is nobody to wait for now, but the Duke. An important omission, certainly, inasmuch as

his Grace keeps, manages, and hunts the hounds himself. But with that true politeness which is the offspring of unselfishness and good nature, this scion of the House of Caradoc never lets his field remember that he "hunts their country for nothing;" and ere the question has been asked, "Have you seen the Duke's drag?" a dark-coloured coach, drawn by a handsome team, with many hunting points about them, draws up at the gateway which has been trodden into a perfect slough since Goody Two-shoes passed it first. The Duke now hands the ribbons to Walter Brooke, divests himself of his great coat, steps lightly on the roller-bolt, and thence swings some thirteen stone of handsome, vigorous manhood into the saddle of a strong white-faced brown horse, pushed alongside the coach with much wincing and "lifting," in order that a mount may be effected without soiling his Grace's boots.

It is beautiful to see the rush of the hounds for their huntsman as he passes into the field. Breaking wildly away from rate and whip-crack, with fawning wistful faces, waving sterns, and high, impatient bounds, they dash at the master they love. Countess and Caroline gambol round his horse ;

Bonnibell throws a silver note for very joy from her unwary tongue, and is instantaneously rebuked for so glaring an impropriety by the second whip ; while old Bountiful, presuming on her high character and great elastic powers, reaches the saddle-bow at a bound, and fairly licks her lord's face, leaving four muddy foot-marks, all close together, imprinted on the white thigh of his well cleaned leathers.

The Duke gathers his reins, feels for his horn, settles himself into a strong hunting seat in the saddle, looks round for the owner of Oakover Gorse, a ruddy, brown-coated old gentleman, who would be unhappy for weeks should it be drawn blank, and with a few endearing expletives scattered amongst his hounds, puts his horse in motion for the covert. There is a simultaneous stir and bustle through the large equestrian assemblage, whereupon Goody Two-shoes, first lashing out at an unoffending pony, rears straight on end and refuses to be pacified.

Walter has mounted Fugleman, and dropped rather behind the cavalcade, for he has seen the chestnut with the side-saddle ; and the Gorse being half a mile from the place of meeting, he will have plenty of time, he thinks, to secure his usual

place for a start. The chestnut is already champ-ing his bit gaily, under the light hand of Lady Julia; and Lord Waywarden, riding a strong good-looking cob, is impressing on his daughter the necessity of trusting his pilotage over the stiffly enclosed grass country they are likely to cross.

“Don’t *fuss*, dear,” says Lady Julia, adding with an arch smile at Walter, “I can take my own line, and keep it, too, in most things I try. Can’t I, Mr. Brooke?”

Walter laughs, and bows, wondering the while why the young lady looks continually about, and behind her, as if in search of some missing object.

“Papa, dear,” she adds, after a pause, “don’t you think the Duke’s absurdly punctual this morning. Half the people can’t possibly be here. *You* came from St. Barbs, Mr. Brooke, I know. How’s the Duchess?”

Walter explains that the Duchess is still confined to the house, from her cold; and poor Rags undergoing a most uncomfortable ride on his fretful mare, immediately in front, feels his heart sink down to his boots, for there is no chance of seeing his planet to-day.

As for Goody Two-shoes, her conduct is atrocious.

Not satisfied with a flourishing progression sideways, such as the *manége* terms "passaging," and which, besides being wholly uncalled for in large grass fields, is somewhat hazardous in narrow gateways, she exhibits all the caprices of her sex and kind, in opposition to the wishes of her rider. Now she throws that pretty head of hers into his face, at the risk of knocking all the teeth down his throat; now she dashes it wildly between her knees, rasping his knuckles against her breastplate, pulling him fairly over her withers, and causing him to present a larger surface of white leather between the skirts of his hunting coat, than is desirable, to those spectators who contemplate him from behind. Lady Julia has a keen sense of the ridiculous; she bursts out laughing.

"Our friend Rags isn't much of a fiddler," she whispers to Walter. "I should suggest a little lighter fingering on the strings, and a good deal more rosin for the bow. If he don't mind his music, that animal will play the whole *fantasia* right through without an accompaniment."

Walter would join in the laugh, but he remembers the three hundred, and refrains. "The mare has been steeple-chased," he explains,

gravely, "and takes a great deal of riding in a crowd."

"She's a dangerous brute!" exclaims Lord Waywarden, whose own cob is not so amenable as he could wish. "Don't go near her, Julia, I beg of you!"

"Is that the horse you bought of your brother?" asks her ladyship, looking, however, in the contrary direction, and regardless, apparently, of Walter's affirmative, which is so far true that Jack is to have a round sum of money for him when he is paid. She has scanned the horizon in the meantime, and looks rather pale, probably from the exertion, when she turns her head again, and leans over to pat Fugleman's glossy neck with her perfect little hand. "If I had such a horse as that," she says, somewhat excitedly, "I'd feed him every day of his life my own self. I'm not sure I wouldn't dress him as well. At least, I'd do his hair. I know I should take better care of him than you men ever do of your favourites, as you call them! I wonder if you know, any one of you, the value of what you've got!"

The hussar accepts this peroration as most hussars would; but Walter is a person who likes

to do one thing at a time, and he is aware that the present situation is little adapted for an interesting avowal, so he contents himself with a tender glance, unfortunately lost on the young lady, who is looking into the far distance straight between her horse's ears.

"Mr. Brooke," she says, after a pause (she likes to repeat his name, making such a soft, melodious word of it ; and this, too, he considers, not without reason, is a good sign), "I think I am rather smitten with your friend Rags. I am sure he's a good fellow, Mr. Brooke. Ask him why he cuts me, out hunting, and tell him to come back and speak to me."

Walter made no objections, for this arrangement suited him exactly. Without being rude or inattentive, he could thus steal quietly to the front, and arrange for Fugleman the good start that gallant horse knew so well how to keep.

Oakover Gorse, you see, was a certainty for a run. There was not another covert to hold a fox within four miles. There was hardly a ploughed field within an equal radius. The grass carried a scent as such districts usually do ; and if a man wanted to be comfortably settled with hounds,

it was an object to arrive early at a certain brook, of formidable width, three or four fields off, and so get over, if possible, without a *contre-temps*.

Walter gave Rags the message with which he had been intrusted; and that hapless equestrian, much flattered by the summons, though somewhat apprehensive as to the means of obeying it, prepared to turn Goody Two-shoes from the course she had adopted, following, as near as her rider would permit, in the wake of the hounds. This retrograde movement, however, was contrary to all her notions of amusement. As well take a girl to a ball, and forbid her to dance! She shook that pretty head worse than ever, reared straight up, and consistently refused to move one yard in the direction required.

Rags was glad to compromise by waiting till Lady Julia should arrive, and even the few seconds that elapsed ere she reached him became a period of severe personal exertion embittered by mental anxiety.

Now, I make no excuse for Lady Julia's conduct, betraying, as it did, an ungenerous disposition to pay off a disappointment of some sort on

an unoffending object. The cat, amusing herself with the mouse, has at least this defence, that she stimulates appetite, and means to eat the victim at last. But Lady Julia had no intention, so to speak, of swallowing Rags. It must have been sheer love of mischief that bade her keep him by her side to the intense irritation of Goody Two-shoes. Neither did Mr. de Rolle, in his heart, care a great deal about the society of her ladyship, for her own sake; but, then, she was a friend of the Duchess; and in the new career he had vaguely sketched out, even honest Rags had worldly wisdom enough to perceive that the assistance of Lady Waywarden's daughter was not to be despised.

"What a beautiful horse, Mr. de Rolle!" observed this malicious fairy; and while she spoke he could not but allow that her wicked eyes were as bright as diamonds. "What a lovely head, and what perfect action! I'm sure it must be a delightful creature to ride!"

The delightful creature here made a bounce in a lateral direction that jerked its rider's foot out of the stirrup, fortunately on the side furthest from the lady. Rags was, by this time, perspiring

freely, and felt as if he had done a fair day's work already.

"She's—*she's* good enough when she's once started," said he; "but *I'm* not quite good enough to ride her. She wants a fellow like Walter there, or his brother Jack, who's a better man still."

The avowal was made breathlessly, and the speaker's hat was over his eyes: nevertheless, Lady Julia liked him for his honesty.

"I thought you could ride anything, Mr. de Rolle," answered this hypocrite, smoothing him down now as craftily as she had intended ruffling him up; "and I always understood Mr. Walter Brooke was one of the best riders in England."

"So he is!" said Rags, eagerly; "and I wish he was here now instead of me. But Jack Brooke's better still on a queer horse. He has such nerve, you see, and such light hands, though he is as strong as most horses himself. (Be quiet, Goody!) I think it's his temper, though, that's his great point. They say he's the best-tempered fellow in England, and that nobody can put him out!"

"I should like to *try*!" thought Lady Julia,

though, of course, she did not express such a sentiment aloud; but she looked very gracious at Rags, and asked him, in a tone of interest and judicious counsel, "why he did not get on his second horse?"

This was exactly what he had intended to do all along before they should find, only putting off the happy exchange thus far because his brother-officers ridiculed his possession of an animal he could not control. His answer, however, died out upon his lips, for, even while it reached them, an electric thrill seemed to pervade the knot of horsemen clustered by the Gorse. A cap was seen held up against the sky, though its owner was hidden by the high-growing evergreens. A heart-beating interval of keen suspense; one shrill, distinct, ear-piercing halloo; the Duke's horn blowing short quick notes from the middle of the covert, and Lady Julia was off like wildfire, at a gallop, Lord Waywarden clattering after her on the cob, while Goody Two-shoes plunged and tore madly in their wake, boiling with excitement, and thirsting to get forward for the run.

"This way! Julia! I *insist!*" exclaimed

Lord Waywarden, as the girl put her horse's head straight for an ugly blackthorn fence with two ditches, of which the furthest was only to be inferred from a horse's tail and a pair of scarlet skirts revolving in the air. "There's a gate in the corner," he added, breathlessly, getting his hand on the rein of his audacious child. "We *must* make for the lane now. He's over the brook already; and with such a scent as there seems to be this morning, this is no time for larking. Mind, Ju, you're *not* to jump that horse till he's quieter!"

"Oh, papa, Cockamaroo will be *so* disappointed!" answered Lady Julia, taking her father's advice however, and swinging along by his side at an easy gallop, her delicate profile looking very pretty under her neat riding-hat; the auburn hair skilfully flattened down in front, and gathered up behind, just leaving the little tip of an ear, with a jewel in it, visible; the taper hands in delicate yellow gloves, holding their reins, with a light, firm touch, far back in her lap, so as to give Cockamaroo's head all the liberty compatible with a gentle and persuasive control, while the sweet, round figure, in its tight-fitting habit,

swayed and gave gracefully to every stride of the well-bred, powerful horse.

It was a pity neither of the young gentlemen with whom she had been riding could see her now; but Rags had no attention to spare from his *surveillance* of Goody Two-shoes; while Walter, with a capital start, and Mexico behind him, would not have pulled back, of his own free-will, for any consideration on earth.

Lord Waywarden's knowledge of hunting, and familiarity with the country, now stood him in good stead, though the fine horsemanship and unshaken nerve of twenty years ago were gone, never to return. Lady Julia and her father, diverging considerably from the line of chase, made at once for a convenient ford through the brook, and, cantering over the opposite rise, found themselves far enough in advance to pull up and look leisurely on the exciting incidents of the run.

These matters take long to describe, though they are acted out in a very few minutes: nevertheless, measured by sensation, they are sufficiently protracted both for pleasure and for pain. Whilst steadying a good horse over the first two or three fields, under the conviction that he is in

for a gallop, a man lives through enough enjoyment to last for a week, and a very short period passed under the same animal, helpless on his back in a ditch, convinces his rider that to calculate time by seconds is an arithmetical fallacy and mistake.

“I said so!” exclaimed Lord Waywarden, whilst his daughter held her breath with delight, for the hounds came streaming down to the water, and swarmed in like bees, stooping to the scent as they emerged, and fleeting on with a faint note of music, but not an instant’s pause or intermission. “I said so!” he repeated, chuckling. “They’ll have plenty of room to-day. I wonder if anybody will have a drive at it, Ju, for, by Jove, it’s a bumper!”

The field had a capital start, and some half a score of horsemen had singled themselves out from the rest, to charge the first fence abreast. Of these, three were down, and one had let his horse go. The Duke got his hounds out of covert as soon as his fox was well away, with a quickness for which he was indebted to their sagacity and affection. They would fly to his horn no less readily than to the challenge of old Bountiful

herself, now speeding along at head, swift, silent, and inexorable as death.

His Grace was out almost alongside of the pack, and, regulating his course entirely by their movements, swung steadily on like clockwork, leaving the brown horse to arrange matters with the fences in any way he pleased, except by refusing them. He and Walter Brooke were the men nearest the hounds when they crossed the second field. How often in those few furlongs the latter changed his mind about letting Fugleman go for three hundred, it is not for me to speculate. Mexico, watching him sailing away in front at his ease, ridden fairly, though liberally, handled with consummate skill at his fences, and crossing them without exertion, as though an unseen hand lifted and set him down again seven or eight yards further on, was quite determined to possess so good a horse, and would have offered the money then and there—if he could have caught him! Of such an event there seemed but little chance for another five-and-thirty minutes or so. As he jumped a high flight of rails into the field through which the brook ran, Fugleman was alongside the body of the hounds, and fifty yards ahead of the

Duke himself. These two seemed the only horsemen inclined to face the water. Swelled by the late rains nearly to its banks, it looked sufficiently forbidding, and it needed but the example of one well-known sportsman to lead every other man out, hastily off, in the direction of the ford. Whilst they hustled down to it, not one of them but confessed in his heart he was wrong, and might as well have stayed at home. Men are apt to be panic-stricken, you see, in a small way, by water no less than fire. Lady Julia and her father exchanged looks of intelligence. They were speculating on the same event from different points of view.

The young lady spoke first.

“He means to have it! Papa, I knew he would. Look! he’s set him going. How well he rides him! I wish I’d a thousand (in gloves) on the event!”

“No hunter in England can jump that water, Ju!” answered his Lordship. “He’ll break his horse’s back, and then he’ll be sorry he didn’t come with us to the ford.”

They saw Walter diverging a little from the line he had hitherto taken. It was obvious that he had

marked with his eye the spot at which he meant to try and compass the brook. He leapt Fugleman over the last fence at an awkward place under a tree, but thus obtained a fair, sound headland, with a fall of the ground, in his favour, leading straight away to the water's edge. It was the masterly manner in which he gradually increased his horse's pace down this incline that elicited Lady Julia's approbation. Fugleman's ears were pointed and his head up; the wild blood of old Frantic, inherited through Fenella, was boiling in his veins. The gallant animal had no more thought of refusing than his rider, and at the pace they were going, it must be in or over, were the place as wide as the Thames!

"It's even betting! It's five to two! It's a guinea to a shilling!" exclaimed her Ladyship, waxing more and more enthusiastic, as Fugleman's quick, determined strokes bore him, stride by stride, towards his effort. She raised her bridle-hand, and moved in the saddle, as if she were riding at the water herself.

"I tell you it's impossible!" answered her father. "Ju, *don't* be so slang!"

"It's a monkey to a mouse-trap!" added the

young lady, looking demurely in his face. * * *

“Papa! the mouse-trap’s mine!”

As she spoke, Fugleman landed safely on the further bank; made a false step, a short stride, recovered himself, and was away at his long, easy gallop after the hounds once more.

The Duke was not quite so fortunate. Riding, as was his custom, very close to his pack, horn in hand, quaffing eagerly at the cup he so loved to drain, and conscious but of one bitter drop in the whole of its contents, viz., the chance that the main-earths might be open at Hatherton Hill, seven miles off, his Grace was unfortunately crossed by a tail hound that had not come away with the rest from the Gorse. To save Graceless from destruction, he pulled the brown horse, at an unpropitious moment, out of his stride. The result was a tremendous flounder, a sufficient ducking, and a ludicrous scramble. Nevertheless, both rider and horse got out at the cost of their wetting, and with no further casualty than a pair of boots full of water and a horn full of mud. The latter instrument was mute for the rest of the day, and his Grace’s enemies, if he had any, might observe that in so far his fall was conducive to sport.

All this, to use an Irish expression, Lady Julia saw “with the tail of her eye;” but its gaze was still rivetted on Walter speeding across a level water-meadow, intersected by deep narrow cuttings, in all the triumph and exultation of being for the moment “alone with the hounds!”

She turned as white as a sheet though, in a moment, and clasped her hands, letting the reins fall on her knee—

“Oh! Papa!” she exclaimed. “Poor Fugleman! Let us go and help him!”

Then she caught her bridle up, and galloped down to the nearest gate, thence crossing a low fence into the water-meadow, followed by Lord Waywarden on the cob, that sturdy animal, by the way, blundering on his nose over the obstacle.

Walter was standing by his fallen horse, looking, for once in his life, really dejected and unhappy. Fugleman’s hind legs were still imprisoned by the deep narrow drain into which they had slipped. He was carelessly nibbling the short turf on which his muzzle rested, his ears were all attention, his eye bright and full of vitality, but his back was broke, and, alas! the gallant hunter was as good as dead already.

Lady Julia was out of the saddle in a moment. She never asked Walter if he was hurt. She knelt down beside his horse on the wet, sloppy grass. She stroked its nose with her delicate gloved hand, so small and pretty, and useless to help the poor animal; then she turned her head away, and tried hard to prevent their finding out that she was crying.

“It’s no use,” said Lord Waywarden, entering into his young friend’s feelings with all the sympathy of an old sportsman. “The sooner he is put out of pain the better. It’s a hard case, Walter, upon my soul! To get over eighteen feet of water like that, and then break his back in an eighteen-inch drain! Cursed hard, I call it!”

The dandy had by this time recovered his habitual self-possession. He pulled an embroidered case from his pocket, and proceeded to select a cigar with great deliberation, observing, coolly—

“The fool had the whole of a fifty-acre field to put his hind-legs wherever he liked, and he must needs leave them in a place not a foot wide. Well, there’s an end of *him*! It’s lucky the days are long. I’ve a goodish walk from here to St. Barbs.

Lady Julia flashed at him a look of indignation that seemed to dry the very tears standing on her cheek. Then she whispered to Lord Waywarden.

"Nothing, Ju," was his answer. "Not all the skill of the Veterinary College. Don't distress yourself, dear. The poor thing is in no pain, and if it were, we can get a gun in less than half an hour. It's the most merciful way. Look! Here are some of the field already!"

Several of that enterprising body now appeared on the scene of action. Amongst them Rags, who had found it hopeless to attempt distinction on the incontrollable Goody Two-Shoes, and who, missing his other horse, wisely subsided, without an effort, into the crowd. These gathered like vultures round the dying horse, suggesting all sorts of impossible remedies, Lord Waywarden, in the meantime, sending a friend's groom back in search of the Oakover keeper, with his gun.

"Take my mare, Walter," exclaimed good-natured Rags. "I see my servant coming through the gate. He shall stay till poor Fugleman is destroyed. Why you'll catch them yet, if you bucket her well, and I'm sure it will do her all the good in the world to take the devil out of her! Jump

on, Walter ; I never was so glad to get off a horse in my life !”

It was a good-natured offer, and, indeed, under the circumstances, there was nothing for it but to accept. Walter mounted Goody accordingly, and the mare seemed to bend her neck at once and carry herself more discreetly under his light, skilful touch. He looked wistfully after the receding chase, but already even the stragglers were disappearing, and it was hopeless to think of catching them now. Though he pretended not to mind it, Walter *did* feel a pang when he reflected that not only had he lost the best horse he ever rode, but the best run he was ever likely to have the chance of seeing again.

For the first time, too, since they found, the recollection of the three hundred, and how it was ever to be paid, flashed across him. He was not a demonstrative man, nor was it his way to swear aloud, but he sent an imprecation back upon his heart that must have curdled all the blood about that organ for more than one pulsation.

It *was* hard to lose such a run. Though some half-a-dozen sportsmen came up at the first check, and continued with the hounds till the finish,

nobody saw it really from end to end but the Duke. I may as well give it in his own words, as detailed to the Duchess, while his Grace was dressing, in a great hurry, for a large dinner party at St. Barbs. It was the only half-hour on hunting-days that they could spend together, and she used to make her own magnificent toilet early, to take advantage of it.

“The best thing my hounds have ever had, you old darling, since I took the country. (Chuck me those slippers, and don’t let the child in till I’ve more clothes on.) You see, we found, and went away directly. The beauties all got together, except a couple and a half. That was Ben’s fault. He’s a willing lad, but slow. They crossed the brook as straight as a bee-line, and scarcely threw their tongues, for the pace they were making. I don’t remember such a scent this season. My child, they ran as if they were tipsy. Unfortunately, poor Graceless got between Tarquin’s legs and bothered him. The old horse went in a good one! A regular header! Precious cold the water was. A good deal colder than this. (Mind I don’t splash that beautiful get-up!) We got out all right, however, though poor Brooke, I

hear, killed his horse. Luckily, we had no damages to repair; but Tarquin shook his ears horribly, disgusted beyond measure with his ducking. Well, we came perfectly straight, over the grass, up to Coltsby, the fox going right across the middle of the fields, and the hounds literally *racing*—Countess and Caroline leading, and poor old Bountiful next. It's the first time she's ever been collared; but they're far and away the best of the litter, and as like old Cruiser as his photograph. However, you won't care to hear all about *that*, and how right I was to put them forward, though Will advised me not. The run you want to hear about, is it, dear? (Hand me those towels. Mind your skirt against my wet things.) Well, they kept beating me every yard they went. They were half-a-mile ahead when they checked, so I can't tell exactly whose fault it was, but I think the young ones had flashed over it. You see there was *such* a scent, and dead up wind! Two fellows, rabbiting, had turned the fox; however, I was sure Hatherton must be his point, and though my horn was full of mud, and I'd nobody to put them to me, I managed to steady them, and hold them across the turnpike-road by Waterley, in the

direction of the Hill. Here Prudish hit it off very creditably, over a dry, stony field (I shall keep Prudish, though her shoulders might be better. She's the last I have of old Pilgrim's blood), and on we went again, almost as merrily as at first. A few fellows had managed to struggle up, amongst them Jack. I wasn't sorry to see him, for though mine are a handy pack of hounds as any in Europe, I can't do much with neither a horn nor a servant. (Give me one of those neckcloths, dear; the white one.) After this, it was plain sailing, almost to the finish. They hunted him at a good holding pace, by Eversley and Pelton, and across the London road, nearly to Marberry, turning as if they were tied to him, and giving Jack and me nothing to do but keep our spurs going and look on. A beautiful sight they were, as they swung down Hollingburn Ridges and across the open, again pointing for the Hill. (Now, the waistcoat, mamma, and let the young one in.) 'It's worth a guinea a minute, your Grace!' says Jack to me, just under Hollingburn House, with his face as red as a turkey-cock's, and his horse's neck stiff. 'I'd give more than that for two fresh horses,' was my answer. 'He can't stand before

them much longer at this pace, were he the stoutest fox that ever was bred.' I had hardly spoken, before I viewed him turning away from the Hill. He couldn't face it, poor devil! and he sank the wind for Wildwood. I think he made up his mind in a moment to try and get there, for I never hunted a gamer fox. Here a flock of sheep had crossed his line, and the scent failed all at once. If I could have blown my horn, or Jack could have raised a trot, I should have held them over it. As it was, old Bountiful picked it out beautifully, and we got on terms with him through some heavy ploughs, where three couple of the young ones came out and did all the work. I fancy this finished Jack's horse, for he never showed again. I was almost afraid now we should get to the Forest, and he might beat us, after all; but they stuck to him over the meadows by Ripplesby in a way that looked very like *blood*, and he began to run short amongst the small enclosures on old Welter's farm. By the way, young Welter went very well on a grey horse that would carry *me*. I viewed the fox twice in and out of a double hedge-row, by the orchard, and I could have killed him five minutes sooner,

but that Fearless and Frolic led all the others wrong by running heel, and Welter, who had no thong to his whip, couldn't stop them. However, it's their first season, and though they were as wild as hawks, they were as fresh as fire. It's undeniable blood, there's no doubt. When I got them back to me, I met him at the corner of the hedge-row, but he whisked through, once more putting his head straight for the Forest, and they fairly ran into him in the open, just below Norman's Cross, nine miles from Oakover, as the crow flies, and exactly one hour and five minutes from the moment old Bountiful opened in the Gorse, with but one check, to speak of, and not a hound, except Graceless, missing at the finish.

"Poor Tarquin was very glad it was over, and indeed I think you may say it was something *like* a run.

"Why didn't we come home? Well, you see, the hounds were pretty fresh, and we got the second horses, and it wasn't two o'clock, so I thought a good rattling would do Wildwood no harm, and I spent the afternoon in the Forest with about as bad a fox as I ever had the pleasure of hunting, even down there. However, I brought *his* nose

home too, and altogether, I think it's been the finest day's sport I ever had since I've kept hounds. You see—Good gracious, there's dinner! I forget who's coming. Which of those old women am I to take in? Run down, there's a dear, and tell them I won't be half a minute behind you."

It is needless to add that his Grace was as good as his word, gave his arm to the oldest Peeress in every sense, and ate his dinner with the appetite of a man who has passed eight hours of hard exercise and happy excitement in the open air.

While the Duke was finishing his fine run, and long before he plunged into the soaking rides and interminable depths of Wildwood, for the afternoon, Walter was riding Goody Two-shoes by Lady Julia's side, as far as their respective roads home lay together.

Lord Waywarden had hunted too many years to undertake the labour in vain of hanging on the skirts of a really good thing, in the wild hope of ever reaching the performers till it is over; and although several of the field, and Rags amongst them, persisted in the fruitless task, he impressed on his daughter, with considerable emphasis, the

propriety of a speedy return, and a saving of their horses for another day.

Walter was in low spirits, no doubt, though he affected to make light of his casualty. He was fond of his horse. Some men whose hearts seem curiously hard in all other relations of life are capable of strong attachment to animals. I believe he almost *loved* Fugleman. Besides, he had calculated on him so confidently for extrication from his difficulties; and now, instead of being cheap at three hundred, he was not worth thirty shillings. Of all times, too, he could ill afford to lose him just at present. Still, I am of opinion that now, while his blood was yet stirring, and his manlier nature aroused by the excitement of the last half hour, the pang he felt most keenly was when he pictured to himself the dangling head-collar, and the empty stall at home.

As he turned in his saddle for a last look to where his poor horse lay, he saw the keeper with the gun under his arm, hastening down towards the brook. Then Walter shuddered visibly, and his lip twitched. Lady Julia observing his compunction, forgave him his heartlessness of a few minutes ago.

Women are the best consolers, after all. Their tact is so fine, their sympathy so intuitive. They neither pull a long face, and remind you by mute stupidity of a sorrow they might just as well dilate on in polysyllables; nor do they jar all your sensibilities, by trying to rouse you into mirth, with efforts about as judicious as those of the ship's steward, who brings you boiled leg of mutton and caper sauce, to tempt your appetite when you are sea-sick. They err in neither extreme; but they summon the resources of their delicate minds, their soft voices, and their fine eyes, to put you on better terms with yourself, and consequently with everything in the world, including the affliction from which you bleed. Lady Julia understood this as well as most other offices of her sex, and made herself so pleasant, and looked so remarkably pretty the while, that Walter, though by no means a susceptible person, and disposed, moreover, to gauge all women by the standard of Mrs. Major Shabracque, began to acknowledge something like the old foolish feeling stirring at his heart once more.

He admitted she was pretty; he considered she was agreeable; he knew she was high bred, and he

had heard she would have thirty thousand pounds. Several vague ideas that had been floating through his brain for some weeks began to assume a less indefinite form. I do not mean that he contemplated laying serious siege to the young lady, and going to her father with the cool proposal: "Give me your daughter and her fortune, in return for my irreproachable exterior, doubtful character, and expectations—of *nothing*." But he thought of what might be; of a home; of true affection; of children; of something better than this gaudy, empty, unsubstantial life; this wide and ever-shifting circle, of which, under its varying conditions, the centre was always self.

The young lady saw he was in distress, whilst trying hard to conceal it. She liked him the better for this feeling, and the effort. Perhaps she had reasons of her own for thus sympathizing with the sorrows of others; perhaps she was not thoroughly happy and heart-whole herself.

Be that as it might, her manner was unusually soft and kind during their ride. She neither mocked at, nor ridiculed anybody, for five whole miles. He was almost sure she pressed his hand when he took leave at the cross-roads, where they

parted. Her late presence seemed to shed a glow over him during the rest of his solitary journey. He felt soothed; he felt comforted, notwithstanding poor Fugleman; he could have felt almost happy, had it not been for that doubly accursed three hundred.



CHAPTER V.

DRIFTING TO LEEWARD.



LUNCHEON-PARTY in a great country-house is about the pleasantest meal of all. The guests are just hungry enough to be in good humour. Some of them have not been many hours out of their rooms. Even those who came down earliest are not yet jaded with the efforts of the day. Breakfast is well enough for quite young people, whom nothing can subdue, or very old ones, who are obliged to take care of themselves, and so privileged to retire to bed early; but for the middle-aged, the weary, the over-worked, it is no such easy matter to resume at ten the flow of spirits required over-night, to last till two, a.m. It is against the grain that a pale face is dressed in smiles, a jaded appetite tempted with hot *salmis de*

gibier, and a relaxed nervous system braced up once more for the give-and-take contest of epigram, banter, and repartee. Women, I think, bear the reaction better than men. If incapable of such strenuous efforts, they can remain, so to speak, under arms longer than ourselves. We are apt to pine for the easy dressing suit, the slippers, the arm-chair, the cup of tea cooling at our elbow, the soothing weed burning slowly between our lips. We have not their energy, their persistence, their spirit of emulation; above all, we feel the want of the noble and sustaining influence of dress. Therefore it is that at breakfast we are dull, pointless, sodden, glad to come down late, and escape observation; unequal to a romp with the children of the house, and somewhat irritated by the stalwart domestic who persists in believing we can eat of every dish, both before the fire and on the side-tables. But let us elude over much civility and attention, get into a snug corner with the newspaper, or a sheltered walk in the shrubbery, to smoke and talk honest male scandal with a comrade, arrive at the sanctum of our bed-chamber, to find the devastation of the housemaids has swept over it, and passed away, write

our letters, admonish our servant, skim that article in the *Saturday Review* which we pretended last night we had read (if not written), and when two o'clock comes, and a great bell above the stables rings out its summons, behold, our weapons are pointed, our corslet laced; we are a giant refreshed, prepared for attack, defence, charge, skirmish, or *sortie*, thrust and *riposte*, "hob nob, give it, or take it."

The ladies, too, appreciate their luncheon thoroughly. The hours of eating for the human subject are a mere question of habit, and a healthy appetite is the most infallible of timekeepers. I know not why our beautiful companions confine themselves to a morsel of toast and a cup of tea in the morning, to a pigeon cutlet, a cubic inch of jelly, two glasses of champagne, and a spoonful of ice at night; but practising such self-denial, it seems only fair that they should go in for a full meal at two o'clock; and so they do, and much good it does them. Charming and delightful as they are at all times, when are they so charming, so delightful, so sympathizing, and so affable, as during the subsequent hour or so ere the influence of good cheer and a glass of brown sherry has

entirely passed away? This is a long dissertation on luncheons; but it may serve to explain why Walter Brooke should have cantered Goody Two-shoes merrily along, with the hope of reaching St. Barbs in time for that sociable repast.

A man's whole life often turns upon the merest trifle—nay, upon a trifle in no way connected with himself, or under his own control. If the Duchess's cold had not been a little better, and yet not well enough to admit of accompanying her husband on the coach to Oakover; if the unpromising morning had not brightened into a finer day than could have been expected; if Lady Goneril had not fancied herself smitten with a literary lion, three parts dandy and one part author, therefore desirous of being intellectual, and archæological, and *blue*, Walter Brooke's afternoon would have been filled up with a round of sufficiently harmless amusement, and this chapter need never have been written.

But thus it came to pass that our ill-fated sportsman, though he rode his friend's mare an honest twelve miles an hour, had the whole of St. Barbs entirely to himself on his return.

Lady Goneril, having waded through a senti-

mental chapter of her lion's last work, liking it none the less that, in common with the general public, she could not understand two consecutive lines, had betaken herself to a portfolio of prints, and very handsome she looked in the process of turning them over, though, as there were only ladies in the morning-room, this was a matter of no importance. Amongst these etchings was one of a fine old ruin, called Norman's Cross, which much captivated her fancy, chiefly, I imagine, on account of a stone tracery round the arch that she thought would furnish a killing pattern for collars. An exclamation of delight brought the Duchess to her side, and that good-natured hostess at once proposed a visit to the original.

“My dear, would you like to see it? It's within a drive. We'll have luncheon an hour earlier, and start.”

Both proposals met with a warm approval. The advancement of luncheon would shorten the morning; the expedition would employ the afternoon. The great object of killing time would be effected, and Lady Goneril's reputation as a *bas-bleu* would henceforth stand upon a pedestal.

So the bell rang, and the groom of the chambers

appeared, the most deferential of men: an order was then transmitted through a variety of channels to reach the stables at last. The coachman was directed to produce the barouche, the sociable, and a dog-cart for some of the gentlemen, while the stud-groom, who disapproved of the whole proceeding, bearing, as it did, in no way on the all-important business of the chase, was required to furnish two quiet saddle-horses and a pony, for certain timid equestrians. Thus, when Walter had changed his hunting things for the garments of civilized life, the whole party had been gone more than an hour.

If luncheon be an enjoyable meal when eaten in public with pleasant company, at the pleasantest time of the day, it is by no means exhilarating when you sit down alone, in a room of some sixty feet by twenty, waited on by two decorous men in black, and three or four attentive giants in livery, the whole force watching every mouthful you eat, and scarcely permitting you to put salt on your plate for yourself. Walter soon bolted a slice of ham and a glass of sherry; then he returned to his room, drew an arm-chair to the fire, and proceeded to review his posi-

tion calmly, and determine what must be done.

His difficulties, like all others of a pecuniary nature, grew more and more appalling the longer he looked at them. The troubles of the heart console themselves with meditation; the troubles of the intellect vanish when you grapple them; but the troubles of the purse, so boldly staved off, so easily ignored when the mind is otherwise occupied, increase and multiply in an alarming ratio when you encounter them face to face, and put them down in black and white.

He had fairly come to the utmost limit of his resources. Three sovereigns and a half-crown lay on his dressing-table. When he had paid his groom's book, and tipped de Rolle's man, who would presently arrive with poor Fugleman's saddle and bridle, to take the mare back, he would literally not have a shilling left. Suppose they played pool before dinner, and he could not purchase a sixpenny life! It was too ridiculous! He laughed aloud at the idea; but it was a bitter laugh, with very little of mirth in it. Then he blamed his father for putting him into so expensive a regiment; his brother Jack—for what? Not

for refusing to help him? No, Jack had always behaved like a trump, he must allow; but he blamed him for not giving him better advice. He blamed every one but himself, the fool that cut those drains in the water-meadow included; and, by degrees, he brought himself to think that he was an ill-used man; that all the world had turned against him; that he was authorized to prey upon that world in self-defence. This was a speculative theory, leading to a vast number of considerations. Amongst others, he remembered how he had backed Benedict for the Great Middlesworth Handicap, "getting on," as it was termed, at a happy moment, viz., when an enterprising public believed the horse to have been injured by a railway accident, and *he* knew better, through information he had paid for. There was nothing dishonourable in this, far from it! Such chances were not to be thrown away. It was part of the system, diamond cut diamond, and woe to the dullest diamond in the ring! If Benedict should pull it off, he would be set on his legs again; he turned over the pages of his betting-book, and cast up the amount that he would clear. It reached a good many hundreds. Then he thought of the

horse's fine form and racing qualities, of his previous performances; above all, of the money he carried, and the parties whose interest it was that he should win. It looked like a certainty. To be sure he had seen a good many certainties bowled over, but this would surely prove an exception. Then he would be on velvet once more. Set up for the summer, quartered at Hounslow, commanding the detachment at "The Gate," what might he not effect with *his* advantages and *his entrée* into London society? He might marry Lady Julia—he might sell out. His troop would be worth a good deal of money. To be sure, he had not purchased it yet, but that, of course, must be arranged somehow by the family. He would have a pretty house in Belgravia, an easy appointment under Government, or a place about the Court, he didn't care which; and the nicest little wife in London. How well she looked to-day on horseback, and how sorry she seemed to be about Fugleman. Oh, it was clear the girl liked him, though, to be sure, there was nothing surprising in that! Yes, he seemed to see his way before him, if he could but get over the next few weeks. Then he started up, and split a large coal that

slumbered on the fire with vicious energy, for he remembered the bill coming due, and how acceptable the money would be now that he had fooled away at whist on the railroad.

As he sat down again and watched the crackling of the scattered coal, a certain hard, evil expression settled on his handsome face. A dogged, sullen look, half shame, half obstinacy, such as the pickpocket wears walking to the station between two policemen, such as the death-cap covers when the culprit's face is veiled for the last time by the hangman's hand. If Walter could have seen himself at that moment in the glass, he would not have recognised the pleasing exterior by which he set such store ; he would have wondered how the aristocratic features, the manly countenance, could look so vile, so base, so low ; he would have pondered and hesitated, and shrank from a measure after which he could never feel like a gentleman again.

Though he heard a step in the passage, and knew perfectly well whose it was, he started, and his heart leaped to his throat, when a smart double knock announced a visitor at the door. His "come in" was dry and hoarse. Though the

room was large and airy, he passed his hand twice across his brow to wipe off the perspiration, and he walked to the window and looked out, that the dapper little personage who entered might not see his face.

It was no other than De Rolle's second horseman appearing, as in duty bound, to report poor Fugleman's destruction; to inquire if there were further orders, and to accept the gratuity which he knew was forthcoming from so "free-handed a gentleman as Mr. Brooke."

He looked wonderfully short and sturdy off a horse, smoothing his sleek head, standing respectfully, half in, half out of the lofty doorway, and exhaling a strong whiff of that "otto of stables" which never fails to cling about the persons of such functionaries.

"I've brought the saddle and bridle home, sir," he began, with a proper attention to business first, "an' guv of them to your servant here. The Duke's bailiff, sir, he offered me a cast in his gig as fur as the Lodge. The mare have been wisped over, an' had a mouthful of gruel. Would you please to give any more orders, afore I take her home?"

The little man looked everybody straight in the face when he spoke. It struck him now, as Walter turned from the window, that the latter must have been shaken by his fall, or perhaps he was sorry for his horse, he seemed so pale and nervous, and unlike himself.

“There’s no hurry,” said he, still speaking with a dry mouth; “the mare’s done nothing, and you needn’t be afraid of trotting her quietly home. Did you see my horse shot?”

“Never left him till all was over,” answered the other, solemnly. “A peaceful ending the poor thing made, too. Just shivered, and gave out. He couldn’t have lived you know, sir,” he added, more cheerfully, “an’ he did his dooty whilst you owned of him—uncommon, to be sure!”

Walter seemed inclined to delay the man’s departure, and put one of the sovereigns off the dressing-table in his hand. Something in the act, though, must have roused the donor’s energies, for he said, roughly and sharply—

“I shall have a letter for your master; come again in a quarter of an hour.”

It was no use putting it off. If it *must* be

done, better do it, without time for further hesitation.

His face cleared, and his whole exterior resumed its wonted appearance, now that he had made up his mind. Drawing a chair to the table, which the Duchess's hospitable care had supplied with pens, ink, paper, and envelopes, in every variety; but opening his own despatch-box for the materials, he wrote off the following letter, hardly once lifting his hand from the sheet:—

MY DEAR RAGS,

I HAVE been more annoyed to-day than I can express. Not about poor Fugleman, though that, as you know, is a loss I shall not easily replace. He was quite the best horse I ever had. It is another matter, however, which I have just learned, that places me in an extremely unpleasant position, and were it not that I am concerned with so old and intimate a friend as yourself, I should be at my wit's end how to act. The case is simply this:—

You remember, some little time ago, being kind enough to attach your signature, merely as a matter of form, to a bill of mine for three hundred

pounds (£300)? That bill, by to-day's post, has been returned to me. It seems that in our joint inexperience and ignorance of business, we had drawn it on a stamp of insufficient value for so large a sum. It should have been a three, and not a two shilling stamp. This, of course, rendered the bill valueless; and as I had already calculated on discounting it, I should be nicely "in the hole" if I could not produce another for the same amount, with the same names, but drawn in more regular form. That favour I should have no scruple in asking you, as it is merely a confirmation of the first, but for one consideration, and this is what vexes me more than anything in the whole business: *I cannot return you the original bill*, and you must take my bare word for its being destroyed. You know how sensitive people are apt to be in such matters; and although you are good enough to compliment me on my imperturbability, even I can sometimes be a good deal put out. I was so provoked at the bother and mismanagement of the whole thing, that I threw the protested bill, from sheer temper, into the fire, and did not remember till it was burnt that it was indispensable I should return it to *you*. It is too

late now to do anything of the kind, and my only course is to enclose you a fac-simile of the original bill, drawn on a proper stamp, and to beg of you to scrawl your name across it as before, when I can promise you shall have no more trouble or annoyance about the business. If possible, let me have it by return of post.

If you ever caught the hounds to-day, you must have had a capital thing. The Duke's first horse has not yet come back, so I conclude they ran far and straight.

What a scent there was, and what fun I had for those few fields before that sad disaster! My poor horse must have covered an enormous distance at the brook. I shall never have such a water-jumper again!

The Duchess asked after you last night. If I am here next week, I fully expect we shall come over together.

And believe me,

My dear Rags,

Faithfully yours,

W. BROOKE.

St. Barbs.

The Martyrdom of St. Fugleman!

Twice was he visited with sore and shameful compunction in the concoction of this precious epistle. Strange to say, these qualms arose from the two minor falsehoods he used to support and bolster up the great lie pervading the whole. He did not like to affirm that he had received letters by that day's post contrary to the fact; and he hated himself for telling Rags the Duchess had asked after him, when her Grace had certainly omitted to do so. These circumstantial perversions, though indispensable to the success of his scheme, he deplored as such; but by some strange warped process of reasoning, he persuaded himself that the reduplication of the bill was less an act of positive swindling than an unfortunate financial necessity, not perhaps exactly on the square, yet neither strictly dishonest, inasmuch as its results were not eventually intended to impoverish the victim.

It could do Rags no harm, he argued, and could make no difference to him, that he should incur a liability for six hundred, 'instead of three, provided he was not called upon to pay it up. This he had resolved his friend should never be asked to do. He had intended all along to stand

between Rags and loss. It was but a temporary accommodation, after all. He would do twice as much for Rags if their positions were reversed. Psha! what a fool he was to make such a fuss about it!

The quarter of an hour had long since elapsed—nay, had grown into more than four times that period, under the genial influence of cold meat in the servants' hall, and the best ale (meaning the strongest) brewed in the county—ere De Rolle's groom thought it time to tighten his mare's girths and put her bridle on for their homeward journey. Having completed his arrangements, and turned her round, ready for a start, he sought the house, and tapped at Walter's door once more. The letter was lying, sealed and directed, on the table.

For one short minute, the whole tendency of the writer's life and education, the impulses and instincts of a gentleman, had prompted him to throw the fatal sheet into the fire, and he had better have held it with his naked hand between the bars till the flesh peeled off his fingers, than turned a deaf ear to the call of honour urging him by all that he held most valuable to turn

back while there was yet time. But, alas! that honour will not always supply the place of principle. The instincts and the impulses of a gentleman, even backed by superstition of race and prestige of position, will not always hold their own against the assaults of keen temptation, or the pressure of unyielding necessity. A man may need something more than these to restrain him even from that which a somewhat inconsistent code denounces as a crime. He cannot stand alone. If he has no stronger hand to lean on than his own, who shall insure him from a fall that must eventually work out sin and sorrow, and inevitable shame? Let him put perfect confidence in his bodily powers and mental resources. Let him never shrink from danger, nor be afraid of work. But let him beware of dependence on his own fortitude under temptation; let him shrewdly mistrust such accommodating counsellors as his passions and his heart.

Walter had the letter in his hand, and was close to the fireplace, when he heard the carriages that brought the ladies back from their expedition grinding the gravel at the front door.

His scruples vanished at the sound. He could not, he *would* not, give up this life of excitement and social success for the want of a few miserable sovereigns. The thing was done, and he would take his chance.

He had rather not face that honest little man again though, with his fearless eyes. He walked down to the library, rang the bell, bade the deferential groom of the chambers inform Mr. de Rolle's servant there was a letter for his master upstairs, and fell to reading an interesting article on polygamy in a weekly paper, without understanding one word.

So Goody Two-shoes carried the letter back to the barracks, and Walter Brooke's spurs were off, and his coat-of-arms defaced, henceforth for evermore.

The ladies came into the library for tea, and the disgraced knight, always a favourite with the women, had little leisure for brooding over his dishonour. They rustled round him, and petted him, and sorrowed for his mischance, scolding him prettily for the unfeeling manner in which he related it, and asking him a thousand questions, betraying the wildest ignorance of the sub-

ject, as to how it came to pass. They had their own story also to impart; for, approaching Norman's Cross, where, it will be remembered, the Duke had killed his fox, they met Tarquin coming home in that state of dignified exhaustion which marks the hunter after a hard day; and so they doubled the distance, and exaggerated the importance of the run; whereupon Walter, whose character for riding stood high enough to admit of such coquetries, vowed he was very glad to have been out of it; and they scolded him, and laughed at him, and petted him all the more.

Lady Goneril was in raptures about the ruin. She was even going to read it up in the county history, and would probably be puzzled not a little at the concise manner in which that erudite work condensed some two centuries of important events into half-a-dozen lines, to explain the first destruction, and subsequent restoration of the edifice.

"You see, I adore everything old, Mr. Brooke," said her Ladyship, assuming her most becoming attitude, as she stretched across him for some tea. "Old plate, old china, old carving, old pictures, old lace——"

“Old gentlemen?” asked Walter, simply. Whereat the Duchess, and Mrs. Wimbrel, and the two Misses Mallard laughed melodiously, for Lord Goneril was at least thirty years in advance of his wife.

“*Young* gentlemen, I think,” answered her Ladyship, smiling sweetly, “but *old* friends.” Then she sighed, and turned her large eyes down to her tea-cup, because it was her *rôle* just at present to be absent and melancholy, and *incomprise*; altogether a waif and a wounded spirit, and out of place in a heartless world. She had assumed this character now nearly a fortnight, and was already rather tired of it, but having brought it with her to St. Barbs, it must last out the visit, just like her morning and evening dresses. For the next place she went to, of course she could order fresh ones.

There are some men, and those, I imagine, not the most unpopular with the other sex, whom no woman ever thinks of marrying. Whether it is that they consider business and pleasure essentially separate concerns, or that the observances expected from an admirer are so different from the qualities required in a husband, I know not;

but they often take a pleasure in the society of the former, all the keener that they never seem to contemplate the possibility of his becoming the latter. I think I have already said that Walter was established amongst them by tacit consent as a man to be monopolized of no one in particular; and when the youngest Miss Mallard, an impulsive, handsome, romantic girl, in her first season, showed symptoms of a preference for this contraband article, the *douane* interfered at once. I have not the least idea—how should I?—to what private ordeal the victim was subjected; how the inquisition, numbering among its familiars her sister and nearest relations, pressed out the drop of heresy from her blood. The torture, I believe, is usually merciless, mysterious, and protracted; but in this case it was to all appearance effectual. The youngest Miss Mallard never looked at Walter now, and very seldom spoke to him; but she was devoted to little Lord Caradoc, and had the child in her lap at this moment, with his chubby hands buried in the wealth of her brown, beautiful hair. She had told Mr. Brooke this afternoon she “was sorry for his horse;” but though this was the only sentence she addressed

to him the whole day, it was spoken so coldly as to seem almost unkind.

It was resolved, then, by a jury of matrons, that Walter was to be appropriated by nobody, though everybody felt entitled to share the attentions of so general a favourite. Lady Goneril would have been even more gracious, but that she went for clever people, just at present, and whatever faults he had, nobody could accuse him of such a social offence as superiority of intellect. Mrs. Wimbrel, whose age and experience might have taught her better, vowed "she doated on Mr. Brooke; he was so quiet, so reckless, so good-natured, and *so* good-for-nothing!" The eldest Miss Mallard, though she remonstrated with her sister, showed her teeth and flourished her shoulders at him on every opportunity. All the others followed suit; and even the frank, out-spoken, warm-hearted Duchess, pleasant and kindly to all her guests alike, warned the Duke, point-blank, that there were two or three of their country neighbours whom "she would *not* undertake to entertain, unless he asked Walter Brooke!"

Of course, the Duke did as he was told. Her word was law, as it ought to be, for theirs seemed

a life-long romance; and he liked the hussar besides, on his own account, summing him up usually with an admission that "the fellow can ride, I *must* say, like a bird! Though I don't think he's much idea of what hounds are doing."

Therefore, her Grace cross-examined him as to his future engagements, without reserve. "You know you're due here the week after next, Mr. Brooke," said she, poising the tea-pot in her hand. "You must not throw us over as you did last time, with some ridiculous excuse about an inspection. You'll meet your dear neighbours, the Waywardens, and Julia—I know you'd go any distance to meet Julia."

A howl from the Earl of Caradoc here broke in on the conversation—Bessie Mallard having upset hot tea into his poor little shoes and stockings. Mamma could alone administer consolation under such a catastrophe; and a pair of fat legs, and innocent dimpled feet were forthwith laid bare and dried by a variety of lace-embroidered handkerchiefs, to be afterwards chafed in her Grace's own white hands before the fire. Bessie Mallard, too, fell down at the Infant Martyr's knees with

great penitence. The small round tea-table was pushed away from the hearth-rug. A crimson cushion rested on the low steel fender. The boy's golden curls were scattered over his mother's folds of deep-coloured velvet, glowing in the fire-light. Graceful heads bent around him, and jewelled fingers busied themselves with his wants. Stately women, in their rich dark dresses, converged on that struggling little patch of white, and Walter's handsome figure towered above the group. It was quite a *tableau* when the other gentlemen came in. More kindness—more condolences—more friendly outbreaks of sorrow and goodwill. Last of all, when he went to dress, a message from the Duke, who had just returned—"His Grace's compliments—so sorry to hear about the horse. Would mount Mr. Brooke to-morrow at Pelton Pastures, on two of his own!"

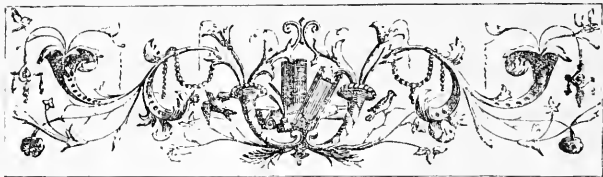
And if they had known—if they had only suspected the truth—not one of these genial, open-hearted, good fellows, but would have crossed the street to avoid meeting him; not one of these kindly, pleasant, sympathizing women, but would have gathered up her skirts, and

fled away, to avoid the contamination of his presence.

In vain he strove to deaden the sense of shame with gaiety, or to drown it in wine. In vain he talked, and laughed, and flirted, and was "better company than usual." He felt that the mark was branded in now, and would never leave him whilst he lived ; that no display could effectually hide it, nor all the wine in the Duke's cellars wash it out. At nine, he calculated, Rags must receive the letter. Bessie Mallard, I imagine, was the only person who noticed how a shadow, as of intense pain, once crossed his face, when he looked at a clock on the chimney-piece. She was sorry for him, wondering simply what ailed him, and sighing gently in her own white bosom, while she turned her eyes away.

Notwithstanding, perhaps in consequence of, the *octroi*, she still set him up in secret for an idol, exalted, pure, irreproachable, without a flaw. Could she have seen the rift that cracked this spurious metal, from head to heel, would she have spurned it beneath her feet, or grovelled down beside it in the dust, seeking a yet lower level

that she at least might look up to it once more for her own private worship alone? She had a woman's rigid standard of Honesty—a woman's keen sense of Honour. It would have been a sore trial either way.



CHAPTER VI.

COLD COMFORT.

EVERYBODY knows how soon people make up their minds to the inevitable. I have been told that a man under sentence of death becomes perfectly reconciled to his fate in about a quarter of an hour. That he feels as if he had been prepared, and intended to undergo this ordeal, for years; and had never thoroughly and essentially belonged to the living world outside.

I think I have observed in mankind a singular faculty of adaptation to either fortune. The beggar on horseback soon relapses into as steady a trot as if he had been in the saddle all his life. Dives destitute, accepts with the condition, the consolations of Lazarus, and eats his crumbs with zest,

making the most of them the very first time he is hungry. When he has nothing left but rags to cover him, and sores perhaps beneath the rags, he forgets, as if they had never been, the fragrant locks, and the supple skin, the bath and the perfumes, the purple and fine linen of his former state. Sometimes he bears privation even better than Lazarus, who is born to it. One who knew human nature well, though, alas! he too often turned it “the seamy side without,” has observed that rich men reduced to poverty are less impatient of their lot than those who have never known the advantages (and the cares) attendant on wealth and position. The golden apples are indeed very tempting when seen from outside the garden-wall; but go in, by surmounting the spikes, or creeping under the gate, according as your temperament leads you to choose between rent garments and dirty hands; fill your pockets with the apples, and your bosom, and your mouth; you will admit that here too you have been deceived, and that the Garden of Paradise you have all your life been seeking, must lie yet somewhere further on.

The path to the *real* garden is steep and narrow

enough, but none can justly call it flinty to tread, or hard to find, being indeed easiest to travel when the wayfarer is weakest and weariest, being never seen so plainly as through a mist of tears. There are many guides, too, rising at every turn, on purpose to help you along the way. Courage, with noble brow; Faith, with broad, firm breast; Gratitude, with full heart and loving smiles; but Sorrow there, with the wasted cheek and the hollow eyes, is safest and surest of all. Her hand is like a vice round your wrist; it chills you to the bone; but its grasp is a giant's to sustain. The others encourage you well enough to affront the perils of the journey—to ford its rivers, to leap its chasms, to break through its briers and thorns; but she alone keeps you steadily to the path, forbidding you, with those mournful eyes, to leave it for a hair's breadth, though the ripe fruit blushes to meet your thirsty gaze, and the dewy flowers drown your senses in a flood of fragrance that seems to rush in from the depths of Long Ago.

She had got Philip Stoney fast by the arm, as she led him across Middlesworth Bridge, on a farewell expedition, for which his better reason could find no excuse; yet, on which he dwelt, neverthe-

less, as the one gleam of comfort in his clouded, and still darkening day.

What advantage a man gains by gaping at the four walls of a building, I have never yet been able to discover; but that the process, though unreasonable, must be refreshing, I cannot conscientiously continue to doubt! Middlesworth Bridge looked very calm and peaceful in the early spring sunshine; for though it was but little past Valentine's Day in England, the sun had actually appeared. The cattle in those fertile water meadows, late risers enough, were on the move, feeding sluggishly, with their heads all the same way. The sedges moaning wistfully as usual, seemed yet to whisper something of life and hope, and better times to come, at least so Philip thought; it may be only because a brisk walk made the blood course through his veins, and circle warmer round his stout, honest, faithful heart. Birds were already chirping in the leafless hedges, and snowdrops plentifully sprinkled its surface, where the copse had been cut over into sharp pointed stubs. With all its promise, why is there something melancholy in the spring? I can understand the "fall of the leaf" suggesting to a sensitive fancy man's obvious destiny, his ma-

turity, the fulfilment of his promise, the commencement of his decay ; but though I can feel, I cannot analyze a sentiment that bids the renewed year welcome, with a greeting in which a nameless longing sorrow has its part no less than a natural hopeful joy. I can understand, though I cannot explain, the mood in which one of the noblest poems in the language pours forth its sad, melodious, and suggestive wail,—

“ And when I saw the Spring
Come forth her work of gladness to contrive,
With all her reckless birds upon the wing,
I turned from all she brought to those she could not bring.”

Philip Stoney's life was completely changed. His whole prospects were ruined by the fire that destroyed the very foundations on which the prosperity of Stoney Brothers had been built. A few weeks, nevertheless, sufficed to reconcile him, in outward appearance at least, to the hardships of his lot. The past seemed at an immeasurable distance now. Sometimes he could hardly believe in the reality of those happy years, with their engrossing labours, their social meetings, their pleasant recreations. No more pic-nics now ; no more gallops with the Duke ; no more covert shooting at Bridlemere.

Was it possible that all these changes could have taken place in the few weeks since the Middlesworth ball? That Middlesworth ball seemed the only reality left ; through all his troubles, labours, and distresses, he found himself thinking of it night and day. The remembrance was like a ray of sunshine streaming across a dismal prison cell. Sometimes, in his less desponding moods, it is the one bright blessing of the captive's lot ; sometimes, in his longing thirst for liberty, it seems the bitterest drop in the cup he has to drain. Yet even when most he chafes at its mocking contrast, he would not for his life forego one single particle of the mote-dust that dances in its golden beam. Philip prized the remembrance of that one night the more, that he must make up his mind now never to look in the sweet pale face, and meet the dark serious eyes again.

He could put his shoulder to the wheel, and was the last man on earth to sit in the mud praying Hercules for help. He arranged the affairs of the firm lucidly, judiciously, and honestly, before he thought of himself. He even settled matters in the most advantageous manner possible for his brother, and his brother's family, before he found

time to look his own position in the face. Then he bought a keepsake for Dot, with a few of the very last coins he possessed; and presenting it with an appropriate jest to that sharp-sighted young lady, found his fortitude more sorely tried in the ceremony than might have been expected from the emotions of so inexperienced a personage.

The child, contrary to her wont, for she was a merry little thing, sustaining the bumps and bruises, and gravelled knees of every-day life, with Spartan fortitude, hid her chubby face on his shoulder, and cried piteously.

“ You’re going away, Uncle Phil; I know you’re going away! Jane told me not to vex you. Don’t go away, Uncle Phil. Stay with me, and mamma, and Jane, and I’ll never vex you any more!”

She was not to be pacified, even by mamma, whose own eyes were red with crying, too; and Philip’s heart was heavy as he sat down to write his answer, closing with an offer of employment in the City.

Keeping a small trader’s books, on a ground floor in Leadenhall Street, is an honest calling enough, and one which affords a view of human

nature varied and comprehensive, if not flattering to our kind. This is nearly all that can be said in its favour. To those who have known better days, especially amongst country sports and country scenery, it is a sad come down. Philip braced himself like a man though for the plunge. He felt a certain honest courage and confidence in his own powers of endurance—a certain pride in his defiance of difficulties; not presumptuous, but grounded in reliance on a Power whose omnipotence makes of Fortune and Fate but idle names for a non-existent influence. He had but one weakness left—he was about to indulge it this fine spring morning in his walk to Bridlemere.

He made it early on purpose. Later in the day it would be absurd and uncourteous not to call. A last interview with Miss Brooke in presence of the family was a needless ordeal to undergo; and, indeed, it would be far better not to see Helen at all. It would still be morning when he reached the house, and he might have a good long look at the closed window-shutters of her room. This could not but be most satisfactory, and, indeed, seemed all he was likely to get. If she should

have risen betimes (he had heard her say she often walked before breakfast), and should visit her garden, he could easily stop in the park, far off amongst the old trees, and look on the dear figure for the last time. Why should he selfishly pain her by saying "farewell." Would it pain her, though? His heart stopped beating while he thought *perhaps* it would; and so strangely constituted was this young man, that although he would have given his life for her, cheerfully, nothing could have afforded him greater pleasure than to be satisfied she was at this moment exceedingly unhappy. I know, also, but I will not proclaim *why* I know, that having solemnly resolved no temptation should induce him to come within sight of her, the first flutter of her dress amongst the evergreens would have brought him panting to her side.

Walking then warily across the park, he did indeed start to see a figure threading in and out amongst the old trees; though why its appearance should have paled his cheek, and made his breath come quick, I am at a loss to explain. Nothing could be less like a young lady on foot, than an old gentleman on horseback; and the figure

was none other than Sir Archibald, breaking in a horse he had lately bought for his niece.

Philip watched teacher and pupil with an interest that their own qualities, though both were above the average in their way, would hardly have elicited. While he looked, a contest was taking place, and the pupil, at first sight, seemed to be getting the best of it. There were deer in the park, a waste of keep, against which Jack protested in vain. The horse hated deer. There was a near way to the stable through a glade of towering old elms. The horse loved his stable, as these animals so unaccountably do. Uncle Archie, cantering him amongst the herd, could not induce him to pass this turn without making a dash for home. Ladies' horses, in consideration of the wilfulness of their burdens, must have no wills of their own. The rider persisted in opposing this tendency again and again.

Young horses, especially well bred ones, are apt to resent anything like prolonged discipline with considerable energy. Two or three sharp rebukes, and have done with it, prove most effectual in controlling these high impatient spirits; but there are occasions when submission on the

part of the rider is ruin irremediable to the horse. Then it is indispensable to conquer at any price ; and there are two methods of achieving a triumph : by violence, which is dangerous and doubtful ; by patience, which is safe and sure. Therefore, if he has time to spare, and the emergency admits of delay, the skilled horseman chooses the latter. Uncle Archie was in no hurry, and he wanted to make the young one quiet enough to carry his niece. He sat like a statue, with a rein in each hand, through all its vagaries, and neither spurred, nor struck, nor jerked the bit, whispering gently and persuasively the while, in the coaxing tone of a nurse remonstrating with a child. The pupil, who had been first terrified by the deer, and then irritated that it might not go straight home, backed, plunged, reared, stood still, and even kicked. The offender was not confirmed enough in vice to lie down, or rasp its rider's leg against a tree. The teacher preserved alike his temper and his balance, till in less than ten minutes the point was gained, the tempting corner passed at a canter (off-leg leading), and that mutual confidence re-established, which makes horsemanship the most delightful of all exercises in a world, where

everything is more or less a question of compromise.

Even an experienced equestrian is not above being pleased with himself, when he has succeeded in taming a disobedient steed. Uncle Archie looked bright, happy, ten years younger, while he rode on, patting his pupil approvingly with the rein laid on its neck.

“Halloo, Philip!” said he more cordially than usual, because his friend had tasted of adversity, “you seem as early a fellow as myself. You’re come to breakfast, of course !”

“Come to wish you good-bye,” answered Philip, returning the kindly grasp. “I go to London, to-day, Sir Archibald, for good and all. I am never likely to see much of Bridlemere again.”

Sir Archibald was off his horse, walking alongside the speaker, leading his pupil by the bridle, a situation which inspires the animal with confidence in its teacher more than all the earacolling of the *manège*. He detected something keener than mere friendly regret in the tone.

“Never say die,” he exclaimed, clapping him heartily on the shoulder. “Look at me ; had you told me five-and-twenty years ago, I was ever to

have a gallop in this old park again, I should have laughed in your beard, if, indeed, when you were cutting your teeth you could have had beard enough to laugh in. Yet here I am, you see, nevertheless, having been kicked about the world like a foot-ball, here, there, and everywhere, in the meantime."

"I wonder you ever left it," said Philip, smothering a sigh.

"Thank God, I did!" replied the other, with a fervency that startled his companion. "My good fellow, you're a cricketer; did you ever go in for a match without making up your mind to win? You're a bowler, and, they tell me, a pretty straight one; did you ever deliver a ball at the wickets without *intending*, at least, to cut the middle stump clean out of the turf by the bowling crease? If you mean business, do it thoroughly; if you don't mean business, let it alone. The bravest man I ever met in Mexico, or anywhere else, I saw drowned, because he *would* turn his horse back in a river when he had swam more than half-way across. Pluck will do a good deal, sir, and coolness more; but commend me to a fine dogged British obstinacy, that sets its teeth and goes in to win, at any price, right or wrong."

"There are some men who play a losing game all their lives," answered Philip. "I don't know why it should be a consolation to have done your best, and strained your muscle, and broke your heart, only to be beat after all."

"There are some games at which it is better to lose than to win," returned the other. "Take an old man's word for it, my boy, the prize is never worth half as much as the training to obtain it. Self-denial and self-sacrifice are the two qualities that distinguish what I call a man from a mere figure to hang coats and breeches on. I speak plainly to *you*, Philip, because I think you're made of stuff that will stand a strain on it, and there's no use denying that the strain may be very hard to bear. You will have to begin life now, instead of ten years ago. Your case is something like my own. Shall I tell you what prevented my hawser from parting every strand, and saved me from drifting helplessly to the devil?"

Philip was interested in spite of his sorrows, and touched, moreover, by the kindness of his companion's manner. In addition to this, they were proceeding towards the house, and the longer the conversation lasted, the more likelihood of arriving

there before it was over, so he replied, with deference—

“Anything in your history that you like to mention, Sir Archibald, cannot fail to be of service to me. Few men have led so adventurous a life, or come through it so successfully as yourself.”

Sir Archibald smiled; the quiet saddened smile of one who is looking far back into the past.

“My life has been a stirring one,” said he, “because I was such a coward I dared not brave my first affliction. Because I had not the courage to stand face to face with my own heart. When a man mistrusts his resolution, it is good generalship to retire. At first, I could only get relief by the stimulus of constant difficulty, requiring constant exertion. I felt that I could only fight my great sorrow by flying from it, and I fled. The path I was bound to take lay very plain before me, but I could only follow it through a rough and tangled thicket that tore and pierced me to the quick. I got a good many thorns and scratches, but still I struggled on, and forced my way. I do not care to publish my history, such as it is, to the world at large. I believe I have scarce ever alluded to it so distinctly before. But

you are young and bold, Philip Stoney ; honest, I know ; and sometimes, I suspect, a little rash. You have had difficulties, adversities, even sorrows, and met them like a man ; still, though the brunt of the fighting is over, by far the most difficult part of the campaign is yet to come. There will be a sad and painful reaction when you find yourself tied down to the drudgery that, in one way or another, we all have to get through at some period of our lives. Then you will, perhaps, begin to fret and complain. You will say yours is a hard lot, a heavy burden ; that there is no sorrow equal to your sorrow ; and Providence itself has dealt with you more harshly than with your fellows. I spin my yarn only to show you that others have had their share of buffeting as well as yourself. I left England, as I then believed, for ever, some thirty years ago ; not, as one good-natured friend supposed, because I had gambled away a younger son's inheritance at Crockford's and Newmarket ; nor, as another charitably affirmed, that I had quarrelled with my elder brother, who refused to pay my debts. On the contrary, I had everything to make life pleasant. Society I liked ; a profession that suited me ;

youth, health, and plenty of companions as young and healthy as myself. I—I was attached to a woman, Philip, such as a man meets once in his lifetime. It's no use talking about these things now, but I—I would have done anything in the world for her. Well, I threw the whole freight overboard, and I saved my own honour and her happiness."

"It must have been hard to give her up," said Philip, simply, thinking of his own burst bubble the while.

"It seemed *impossible!*" answered the other, "and therefore could only be done *with a rush*. I shut my eyes, and leapt, and the thing was over. I never so much as received a line from her again. Do you think she will not thank me when we meet the other side of the blind ditch, so deep, so narrow, and so easily crossed? Do you suppose I thought I should *never* see her any more when I put a thousand miles or two of blue water between my wild passions and the sweet innocent face? What is the use of believing in anything, my good fellow, if you don't act upon your belief? As surely as I darkened my short span of life here by leaving her, so surely will she take me by the

hand, and thank me that I saved both her happiness and my own, hereafter. I would have done it for her sake, even had I thought we were never to meet again. Now the sacrifice seems as nothing compared to the return. What saved us both from ruin was this—the certainty of a future. She has been dead, Philip—dead for years. The trees that were planted when the grass first grew above her grave are now twenty feet high. There is but one life that parts us, and it is not worth ten years' purchase. I can look at the whole thing calmly, hopefully—nay, cheerfully, to-day, but it was hard, I grant you, very hard at the time, and had I not cut the link that bound me to her at one stroke, I never could have undone it while I lived. Your case might have been worse, Philip, after all. You have lost your past, and your present is none of the fairest; but, even in this world, you have got your future still."

"Men have risen in London from very small beginnings," said Philip, brightening in spite of himself, through his companion's influence. "And to London I am going, to start in life afresh, on fifty shillings a week. By the time I have saved a fortune out of that, Sir Archibald," he added,

bitterly, "I shall be pretty well on into the future you speak of with such encouragement."

"Put your trust in Heaven, my boy, and keep your powder dry," answered Uncle Archie. "If the chance arises, be ready to take advantage of it. If it never comes at all, remember it is not *your* hand that steers the ship. Keep your weapons sharp, and, above all, your shield as bright as a diamond. With head and heart, and a clear conscience, none of the prizes of life are out of a brave man's reach. Here we are at the windows, and my brother down already. I'm glad of it, for I'm nearly famished. Ring that bell, there's a good fellow, for somebody to take the horse, and we'll go in and ask Helen to give us some breakfast."

A family party was, indeed, assembled in the cheerful morning-room, consisting of the Squire, not in the best of humours; Jack severely shod and gaitered, with a shooting-dress of defiant materials, much frayed and weather-worn. Tatters curled up on the hearth-rug, solemnly noting everything with one sleepless eye, and Helen herself in her usual place, looking very pale and handsome behind the tea-urn.

It was a formidable moment for Philip, and he followed Sir Archibald through the French window, with hot cheeks, cold hands, and a beating heart.

No aneroid barometer is so sensitive of change as the temper of a man in love. The price of Consols does not fluctuate so variably as his spirits rise and fall with the apprehension of hostilities or the prospect of peace. Helen put her hand out so cordially, and the sweet eyes were raised with such a kind, sympathising look to his face, that Philip felt a whole ton of care lifted off his heart in an instant, and voting ruin, or even absence, bought dirt cheap at the price of such looks as these, sat down to breakfast in a state of unreasonable happiness that completely took away his appetite.

This phase lasted halfway through his first cup of tea, to which Miss Brooke helped him, as she did to every other article of nourishment with her own hands. Then the Squire, whose breakfast was a tedious and untidy performance at best, and whose fork seemed to have forgotten the shortest way to his mouth, rapped impatiently on the table, and called out—

“Helen! Helen! When you’ve done with Mr.

Stoney, I wish you'd give me some tea. What's the matter with you this morning, child? I'm sure you needn't treat Philip with so much ceremony. You're no stranger here, Philip; but I wish you'd come oftener. When's the brewery to be finished. Hey?"

The Squire did not remember things very clearly now. The fire at the brewery had served him for several days with a subject of which he made the most, enlarging on it to his listeners in every conceivable aspect, and originating the most improbable surmises as to its cause, progress, and eventual effects. Now, he had forgotten all about it, though he treated Philip with a more marked friendliness than usual, as though he had some dim, hazy consciousness that Stoney Brothers were ruined.

The guest would have answered, but he felt his face was scarlet, and pretended not to hear. Helen, too, seemed very busy with the urn, and although the heater of that domestic article was usually denounced as useless in sustaining a necessary temperature, I think, on this particular morning, no complaints were made of its deficiency in caloric.

After the Squire's observation, Miss Brooke never looked at Philip once. Neither did she speak to him, nor, indeed, to any one at the table. My own conviction is, that she dared not trust her voice, lest she should cry, and what position could be so false as that of a tea-maker in tears?

Jack, with his usual felicity, commented on the cloud that seemed suddenly to have overshadowed them. He had himself, as yet, added nothing in the way of conversation to the common store, though he made exceedingly good practice with eggs, ham, hot rolls, butter, mutton chops, cold pie, and the usual materials of a country-house breakfast. Now he pushed his plate away, and remarked—

“We are rather dull this morning, don't you think so, Philip? We want Walter back to keep us all alive.”

Jack believed steadfastly in Walter for every purpose, grave or gay, though a less partial companion must have observed that the hussar seldom thought it worth while to put forth his powers of amusement for his own family.

Philip ventured to reply, that “He was not himself in particularly high spirits. He had

come to wish them good-bye, which was always painful, even at breakfast time. He must go to London just as the spring weather was beginning, and Bridlemere looked beautiful. And he was sure he should never see a place like it anywhere else."

Then he stole a look at the tea-maker, and admired, as he had done a hundred times before, the length of her eyelashes, for she gazed steadfastly into her plate, having discovered something no doubt very novel and curious in the pattern, blue and gold, with the Brooke crest in the centre.

"Dull," said the Squire. "We're all dull now. I don't know what has come over the house. Jack there was always a stupid fellow from a boy. I never hear Helen's voice except when she's reading to me: and my brother Archie gets his letters at breakfast time. Where's Walter? why isn't he down yet? Gone to St. Barbs is he? I wish he'd stay here, now I'm better. But he's right. Jack, I say Walter's quite right to go into society. What was I saying? Yes, Waywarden's altered, very much altered. He's quite a young man too; he's younger than I am, though you wouldn't

think it. Let me see, Archie, wasn't it the year I married that Waywarden shot the woodcock in my poor wife's flower-garden? Helen, I wish you'd leave Stoney alone, and put more sugar in my tea. She's very absent sometimes, Archie, just like her poor mother. Don't you think she's growing very like her mother about the eyes?"

Helen cast a pleading look at her uncle, as often happened when the Squire's infirmities took this unhappy turn for personality. She caught his eyes fixed on her with a depth of loving tenderness that was very touching in that old, war-worn face, but he interposed, as usual, with a light laugh, to spare her visible embarrassment.

"Helen is in a horrible funk, as Jack calls it, for she thinks I shall ask her to ride Clarion this afternoon, and she must have seen him mutiny from her bed-room window, half an hour ago. Didn't you, Helen?"

"Yes, I did," said Helen, "and I watched you a good ten minutes before you conquered him."

Then she remembered what had kept her so long at the window, and that the horseman's was not the only figure in the park. How she wished she had held her tongue. How she wished she had

the faculty of reserving her blushes till she was alone. It would be a relief, thought Helen, when this interminable breakfast was done. And yet, though the ordeal was painful, she would have endured it cheerfully till luncheon time, because, when a move took place, one of the party must go for good and all.

Jack was the first to get up. No sooner did he push his chair clear of the table than Tatters started instantaneously from a state of profound repose to one of exuberant and inconvenient energy. Jack, according to custom, was bound for the farm, and his round of trial and self-restraint was about to commence.

“Don’t forget the new plough,” exclaimed the Squire, who had issued contradictory orders concerning this instrument every day for a month; “and mind you tell Jones not to give a warranty with the colt. If Marks won’t take him without, he can let it alone. And mind, Jack, they’re to do nothing at the ten acres yet. I won’t have a spade put in, nor a tile carted, till I can see it done myself. Drained? Of course it must be drained. But I shall be about the place again by the middle or end of next week, and that’s time

enough, in all conscience. Let old Stubbs begin thinning Shotsdale, and I'll see him to-morrow to arrange the top and lop, only they musn't touch a stick below the Middle Ride. And, what was I saying? Oh! the colt's not to be sold at all till I've seen him. And the draining? Yes, I'd almost forgotten about the draining. You've no head, Jack; you never remind me of anything. They must get to work with the draining at once. Begin with the ten acres, you know; and if Stubbs bothers about Shotsdale, tell him I won't have it thinned at all. It's the best covert in the country. Waywarden killed two-and-forty phesants in the corner by the pond. Let me see, was it the year before or the year after he shot the woodcock in your mother's garden? And never mind the plough, Jack, I haven't made up mind about it yet. And—and—that's all I can think of just now, but let me see you again before you go out, in case I should remember anything else."

So Jack's task, you observe, was no very easy one; and though Tatters was doubtless a great comfort, it was a heavy burden he had to bear, and a heavy heart to help him. Everything about the place was mismanaged, and going to the

bad. Nor, while his father lived, did Jack see any prospect of amendment. It was provoking; it was discouraging. Moreover, he could not but feel that he was fit for something better than this every-day drudgery, without even the satisfaction of doing his drudgery effectually in his own way. He neither received the wages of a servant, nor possessed the authority of a master; and while he saw his future estate gradually but surely crumbling away under a system of extravagance and mismanagement, he was himself leading a life of almost penurious privation and self-denial.

But Jack, like his uncle, had a strong sense of right. A firm reliance on duty as a cure for discontent. In some of the Brookes this feeling was altogether wanting. In some it amounted almost to a religion. Jack was a square man in a round hole. He knew it, felt it, was very uncomfortable, but being there, made the best of it, and shaped off his edges as well as he could.

Tatters only thought his master walked a turn faster than usual, while he took his accustomed path across the park, in the direction of the farm.

Neither was Uncle Archie without his own annoyances. The Squire was perfectly justified in complaining that his brother read his letters at breakfast. One of these missives made him pull a long face before he had finished his first cup of tea. Helen, who possessed of course the feminine faculty of seeing distinctly through her eyelids, knew by a certain way he had of smoothing his moustaches, that he was at a loss. If she could have trusted her voice, the voice that never failed to brighten him into smiles, she would have spoken.

Perhaps, had she known the cause of his vexation, she too would have shared in it very keenly, honestly angry as women are under disappointment when caused by ingratitude; they boil up and quiver all over, flashing out sparks of generous impatience from their eyes, when the other animal only smiles cynically, as though he expected nothing better from the nature of his kind.

Uncle Archie had written to a friend, a real friend, whom he had once taken out of prison with the last hundred he would see before pay-day, and another time dragged from the Danube, more dead than alive, under the unpleasant sputtering

of a Russian howitzer, who on both occasions had vowed eternal gratitude, and whose bare word would have now been enough to obtain for Philip Stoney an office under Government. The real friend had written to refuse point-blank. Altogether, the little party had sufficient cause to be dull, and the gloom only deepened as the time to separate approached.

Uncle Archie, what with the perusal of his letters, and the discussion of a very elaborate and substantial meal, prolonged his sitting to the utmost permissible limits, but even he rose at last. The Squire's old valet came in to remove crumbs and other fragments from his master's dress, to pass a damp napkin across his face, and run a comb through his scanty, silvery hairs. Then he proceeded to wheel the invalid, feebly waving farewells to Philip with an inane smile, into the library, where he would take up his usual position till dinner time.

Sir Archibald collected his letters, and walked out at the French window, lighting a cigar. Helen, with a strong inclination to take flight, and a stronger still to remain where she was, and have a good cry, locked up the tea-caddy

with the greatest care and assiduity. Philip Stoney, feeling his hands like ice, his heart like fire, and his tongue cleaving to the roof of his mouth, found himself, on the eve of quitting her for ever, alone with the woman he loved.

What a situation for a scene ! What a chance for a declaration, an avowal, and—the usual consequences ! Here were the properties, the accessories, the actors themselves, dressed in character, and knowing their parts by heart. A wainseoted room, a silver breakfast-service, a high chimney-piece, an old-fashioned screen, and a portrait of the first Brooke of Bridlemere, looking down on the whole. Through the open windows a blue sky, a bright sunshine, brown ferns waving in the breeze, long vistas of grand old elms, with the deer wandering ghostly and indistinct between, rooks wheeling across the sky, and far away, through a break in the avenue, the yellow straw-yard and red-tiled roof of a farm.

Near the table, with its glitter of plate and its snowy cloth, a beautiful young woman, grave, and pale, not half so placid as she looked. Leaning against the chimney-piece, a man who had

always thought her an angel, and never dared to tell her so.

It was, indeed, a great opportunity, and what came of it?

Philip got his lips unglued so far as to enunciate the talismanic name—"Miss Brooke."

He said it in a voice so unlike his own that she raised her startled eyes. Then he stopped; and Helen unlocked the tea-caddy she had just locked up.

"Miss Brooke!" he tried again, more distinctly; and I think in another sentence it would all have been over, but that the Squire was at this moment heard calling "Helen, Helen!" in testy and impatient accents, from the library.

The girl looked up almost wildly.

"I must go," she said. "My father wants me: I hear him calling. Mr. Stoney, God bless you! and good bye."

Her hands were both in his. Ere he could bend his head down to them, they had slipped from his grasp, and she was gone!

Then Philip Stoney realized, for the first time, the whole extent of the misfortune that had befallen him.

He would wait to see nobody else now. After a parting with Helen, and *such* a parting, other farewells would be a desecration. He took his hat; he stepped through the window; he looked neither to right nor left, but walked away quietly, steadily, slowly, yet resolutely, in the direction of Middlesworth, of London, of the end of the world! never to see her again—never, never again!

His heart had thrilled with one moment of intense, unspeakable joy, but it was over directly. He was scarcely across the window-sill ere the reaction came on.

“She did not call me ‘Philip,’” he thought. “She said, ‘God bless you, *Mr.* Stoney.’ What could I expect? I am the loser in the game all through, and I am glad of it, for her sake. It is better so. What matter how much I suffer, as long as she is contented and happy? Had she cared for me as I do for her—no, that’s impossible; but had she cared for me at all, she would have been miserable now. Thank Heaven that she does not—I say, thank Heaven that she does *not*! Let me look along my future calmly, without prejudice, like a man! It is only in moments like

these a fellow requires to call upon his pluck ! I shall love her all my life : there's no harm in that. I shall love her as if she were an angel in Heaven. Sometimes she'll think of me, and remember this morning, and like to feel that if she had chosen, one man, at least, in the world belonged to her, to do what she pleased with—to take or leave—to mar or make. She will be a great lady some day ; the noblest name in England might be proud to win her. She will be a happy wife. Yes, I *pray* she may be a happy wife. I wonder if I shall ever see her ; perhaps with children, beautiful like their mother, dark-eyed, and with her own sweet smile—the darling ! Let her only be happy, and I don't care what becomes of *me* !”

I think Mr. Philip Stoney, thus communing with himself, all unconscious of the fine spring morning, loved Miss Brooke better than Launcelot loved Guenevere. I think there is a chivalry of self-sacrifice nobler than the chivalry of daring. I think a man's own happiness is the most precious offering he can lay at a woman's feet.

He walked very slowly and thoughtfully across the park. You see he had not much before him

in the future; and, were they not painful, what credit would there be in these efforts of our better nature? It was all Bridlemere till he reached the high road, and Bridlemere was a magical name to him, though he was but a young brewer; as magical a name as if he had been the first Caradoc himself, with Arthur's *accolade* on his shoulder, riding in mail and plate, through an enchanted forest, to seek his peerless bride.

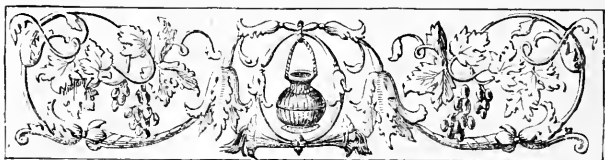
There are giants in these days, as there were in those before the Flood; and we should know it, could we but measure them about the heart. Brave men have lived before and *after* Agamemnon, and the Victoria Cross is earned, if it be not won, several times in a week. But of all efforts, that which most elicits the qualities of courage and patience, that which realizes the highest type of heroism, is the entire offering up of self, without a boast and without a murmur, to the happiness of another.

Philip looked back towards the house once or twice as he went along. It was natural he should. He pictured to himself the Squire's easy-chair in the library; the white head resting on the back, the cushions piled to prop the failing limbs; the

daughter's graceful form bent over a book, as she read to her father in that gentle, quiet voice, so sweet and yet a little sad, which was not the least of Helen's charms. When he reached the rising ground, beyond which Bridlemere was no longer visible, he turned again for one more look, and could have believed he really saw the scene his imagination painted for him so vividly.

Such clairvoyance is not always to be trusted. The real scene was this: An empty bedroom on the second floor, the blinds drawn, the fire-irons rolled in the hearth-rug, the apartment "put away." No chance of intrusion from the housemaids, and a pale, beautiful face, with the dark hair pushed back, peering from behind the blind, watching, watching, eyes fixed, lips apart, not a quiver in the delicate features, but a load of care on the clear and gentle brow. Presently the eyes light up. Somebody has stood still upon the rising ground amongst the trees, and turned round towards the house. A pair of white hands clasp each other hard as he disappears behind the hill. Then a shudder creeps over the lovely, sorrowing face. Helen Brooke turns from the window, to

fall on her knees by the disused bed, and, burying her head amongst the doubled-up blankets, gives a little helpless moan, and cries, poor girl! as if her heart would break.



CHAPTER VII.

PARTNERS.

NOBODY on earth enjoys the country like a real Londoner. There is many a man who farms his five hundred acres without getting half the exercise, enjoyment, and excitement out of his fertile loam and broad smiling pastures, afforded from a rood or two of garden, if it be only within ten minutes' distance of London Bridge by rail. Probably, as desire springs from separation, so is zest the child of contrast. To sit in a dingy back room all day, decently attired, intent on the one great object of money-making, must wonderfully enhance the luxury of a careless, unbraced lounge, with a rake and a straw hat, amongst the evening perfumes of your own garden in summer. To know that you

musn't stay more than ten minutes, and that this monthful of fresh air is to last you all day, till the 6.30 train brings you back again, cannot but impart to each precious gasp an exquisite flavour, of which the habitual rustic shall never know the charm. Christopher North says, if he had to write a poem on Loch-na-Gar, he would descend to the depths of a metropolitan coal-cellar, and, doubtless, visions never equalled by reality are conjured up every day in dark dusty offices, in crowded warehouses, in noisy City thoroughfares on which the sun cannot shine, behind ink-stained desks, over weary ledgers, in the midst of the traffic, and turmoil, and distraction of hot, hurrying, busy, panting London. Visions of grass-grown meadows, rippled by the fresh country breeze, of hedges white with May, or black in the luxuriance of their tangled prime. Here the broad river flashing back the sunlight from a sheet of gold; there the deep woods hushed and motionless, sleeping in the light summer haze. Fancy, stimulated by longing, paints the panorama with her softest brush dipped in her brightest colours, and the dreamer's eye, bounded by a horizon of ten feet at most, wanders over half a

kingdom, to feast upon the riches, and the variety, and the glories thereof.

Mr. Pounder, grave, deliberate, sedate of manner, and precise in attire, was a different person altogether from a hale, hearty, broad-shouldered man, in a flannel-shirt and straw-hat, with open neck, and sleeves turned up, showing, by the way, a *physique* that would have done no discredit to a bargeman, digging for his life, before breakfast, in his garden at Balham, whose name was Pounder, too. The Strand Pounder was smooth, plausible, exacting, suspicious, and utterly without compassion. The Balham Pounder was a cheery, open-hearted fellow, free of speech, given to hospitality, careless, generous, and confiding, a little *sat upon* by his wife, and much too indulgent to his children. Yet the man was no hypocrite in either capacity. He was simply one of the many actors on our stage whom circumstances compel to "double a part." In each character he was equally in earnest. To see him digging now you would say there was no such enthusiastic gardener in the world.

A sturdy boy, absurdly like the man in squareness of form and doggedness of feature, follows

his father's movements with intense interest. Showing thus early the tendencies of Cain, he is armed with a spud taller than himself, for the destruction of slugs, and he uses this weapon with unsparing energy. There is blood on his dirty little hands; he will very likely object to these tokens of his success being washed off before breakfast. In the meantime, he feels only inferior to his ideal, the large, strong, good-natured father, who has dug all that piece of ground since sunrise.

Every now and then, Pounder straightens his back, and looks round his "little place," as he calls it, with immeasurable satisfaction. In Horace's garden he had space to find a lizard; Pounder's is just large enough to contain a thrush, and is haunted by one of those birds with the clearest pipe in Christendom. Woe to its hopes of reproduction though, should Pounder junior find the nest, as find it he surely will. "Those little hands were never made" to spare anything so suggestive of destruction, and nobody will be surprised, though mamma will be very angry, if the thrush flies further off into Surrey against another year.

The colonists of Balham measure their land by feet rather than acres. Mr. Pounder's garden is a hundred and twenty feet one way, taking in the close-cut privet hedge, and in this space every style of landscape gardening has been attempted with varying success. While he looks round it now in the intervals of his labour, he speculates whether he will not do something more in the manner of the Crystal Palace at Sydenham. Move those flower-beds further back; cut down that laurel; plant rhododendrons in the vacant space; put a basin and fountain, railed in for security against children; and scatter grotesque monsters and statues about the whole. He must think it over, he says to himself, getting to work again, fully persuaded that he can carry out the new idea with success.

A little girl in a sun-bonnet, on whom Pounder junior looks with some contempt, as being only a sister, comes trotting out of the house, and puts her face up to father, to be kissed. She is a demure little lady enough, and has been sent by mamma as a forewarning of breakfast.

Mrs. Pounder herself now appears at the door, with another yet smaller child holding by her fore-

finger. Mrs. P. is a "genteel person," at least she would probably so describe herself, and is proud of possessing great administrative powers. She is thin, pale, freckled, slim-waisted, and prolific, having nothing remarkable about her but prominent teeth and long ear-rings. She rules the household, including Pounder, with a temperate but absolute sway; keeps its expenditure down to the most prudent financial estimate; goes to church very often, to parties very seldom; is especially fond of her garden, though, small as it is, she scarcely walks to the end of it once a month; and bears successive branches with the unremitting regularity of the olive.

"Father!" she calls, in a shrill voice, shading her eyes from the morning light with her hand. "Breakfast!" and disappears again, to make tea, with a quiet rapid step that sufficiently denotes the decision of her character.

Now, this is the part of the day Pounder enjoys most. Fresh from the pure air and hard exercise of the garden, it is delightful to put on decent clothes, and sit down to a good breakfast in the society of wife and children.

The tiger has its cubs; the vulture its brood; the

money-lender, no less than these animals of prey, must provide for the necessities of home and young. When he fastens his talons on the devoted buck, to drain his blood, it is not his own fierce thirst he has to slake. The little ones must be fed. Though the victim is bleeding gold at every gasp, the operator is, perhaps, but fulfilling one of the best and noblest instincts of our nature.

Pounder was hospitality itself. Nevertheless, he *did* look a little disappointed to hear a man's step on the gravel—to see a man's figure coming up the path. Whoever it might be, he would have welcomed him more cordially to dinner than to breakfast, and he knew well enough at the first glimpse who it *was*. There were few people he would not rather have seen at the “little place” than his swell partner, fashionable in dress, overbearing in manner, and crushing in influence, from the large share he had in the business.

“Come to breakfast, Mr. Multiple, I hope!” he managed to say, however, with a good grace enough. “My dear, a place for Mr. Multiple;” and Mrs. Pounder, who piqued herself on her breeding, had presence of mind to check the apologies that rose to her tongue, for yesterday's

tablecloth, the assistance of the children, and her own second-best gown of the year before last.

Multiple was not above doing great man amongst those who were dependent on him. He enjoyed the deference with which he was treated, the surprise of his hostess, I fear—even the confusion created by his unexpected arrival. He was dressed, as usual, with much splendour, looking handsome and vulgar enough. Mrs. Pounder, who thought herself a good judge of such things, considered him a pattern of what she called “a fashionable West-Ender.” She only wished, though, there had been time to turn that tablecloth, and she could have put her hand on two more eggs in the house.

“That’s a fine boy!” said Multiple, nodding at the eldest-born, who was watching the visitor with unaffected displeasure. “Like his father as two peas. And been gardening, too. I know you’re an early man, Pounder, so I won’t apologize for coming to breakfast. Plenty to eat, thank you, Mrs. Pounder. Sure never to find *you* unprovided. I’ve got some business to talk over with your husband, after breakfast, as usual.”

The prospect was unwelcome. Pounder did not

like to have business brought down to Balham, when the firm paid such heavy house-rent for their workshop near the Strand. It spoilt his meal altogether, and, indeed, the guest was the only one of the party who showed a good appetite, for the children were intimidated by the stranger, and Mr. Pounder, "a very poor eater," as she said, "at the best of times," was now much too flurried to swallow anything but a morsel of dry toast and half a cup of tea.

The master of the house felt a little sulky, nor was his mood improved to learn that his partner had thus intruded to save himself the trouble of going on to their joint place of business in the afternoon. Multiple had been staying near Croydon, with some smart friend, where he met Lord This and Lady That—firing off these great names for the edification of his entertainers, in his usual swaggering style. Pounder could scarce suppress a movement of impatience at the mention of all this unbusiness-like gaiety, but he *did* suppress it, notwithstanding. Every man, they say, in one way or another, has a hook in his nose, and Pounder was anything but a free agent where his partner Frank Multiple was concerned.

Mrs. Pounder soon made her escape with her brood. The visitor put his dirty boots on a chair, lit a cigar without asking leave, and proceeded to business at once.

“Get a pen and ink,” he said, somewhat authoritatively, “and take down my directions, if you are likely to forget them. You can go up by a later train.”

Pounder, much dissatisfied, was forced to comply. His guest puffed out a great cloud of smoke at the tea-urn, and went on—

“Captain March’s paper is no use to us any longer. Mexico has refused point-blank to put his name to another bill. I had it last night from Mounteagle, who sat next me at dinner. By the way, I doubt if ‘Mount’ will be able to swim much longer. Have you got March’s name down?”

Pounder nodded, and put his pen behind his ear, while he looked over a note-book. He was the Strand Pounder now; Balham no longer.

“Haman will take the last on the usual terms,” said he. “It’s as good as the others. I’m sorry my lord’s found him out. He was a fair customer to us, was the Captain!”

“He’s done at last,” observed Multiple. “Don’t *you* forget it. Sixty per cent., and half goods, wouldn’t tempt me now. There’s a little thing to be done for Bolster and Co. on commission. I’ll give you a note of it, and you can set about it this afternoon. Did you sell those South Africans yesterday?”

“Waited one more day, sir,” answered the other. “The market won’t turn on us, I think, just yet.”

“Don’t *over-boil* it, that’s all,” said his partner. “The House won’t have it, I know, and they’ll go down by the run directly Parliament meets. By the way, old Gobie’s dead, and the *post-obits* have fallen in. It’s a tolerable haul. I thought he was good for ten years at least, and so did his son. That reminds me: what did we do Lord Mount-eagle’s last at?”

Pounder turned over the leaves of his notebook, and answered—

“Thirty; all cash.”

“Thirty—all cash,” mused his partner. “Well, I hardly know. I don’t much like to refuse him, but there’s a deal of bad paper about.”

“It’s best to be cautious,” answered the other,

“though his lordship, I believe, *will* be very rich.”

“One brings another, it’s true,” continued Multiple. “Still, it often happens that those who have most friends have least money, and it’s not business to advance, even at a hundred per cent., if you’re never likely to be paid at all.”

This was incontestable. Pounder admitted it. After a pause, he observed, with some hesitation—

“I hope you’ve made a good bargain about the young horse, sir. I tried to dispose of him for you, to an old customer, but he would have nothing to say to it. These ventures seldom pay well, sir, in our trade. Somehow, they don’t seem to fit into the business.”

Now, this young horse was rather a sore subject between the partners, and had occasioned more than one remonstrance on the part of the elder. Pounder stuck to the old-fashioned principle of risking but one speculation at a time, investing the profits as so much capital to the good, after deducting a percentage towards a fund against occasional loss. With great caution, close attention, and a strict adherence to his favourite rule of never standing “a heavy shot,” whatever might

be the temptation, he thought this the safe and sure way of making a fortune.

Multiple, on the contrary, went on a different system altogether. He argued, that to be engaged in a great variety of speculations involved familiarity with the private affairs of an extensive acquaintance. In one circle he could get information that afforded valuable aid to his transactions in another; and a money-lender, he opined, should be the best authority on all matters of the Turf, the Exchange, the Share Market, nay, even on home politics, foreign affairs, and the last blunder committed in Downing Street. He was the reverse of his colleague in ideas and principles, as in dress and appearance; but, at Balham or in the Strand, his will was law. He had a hook, you see, in his partner's nose, and though made of mere paper, it was stronger than iron, because it represented gold.

"I shall keep the horse, and win 'The July' with him," said he, abruptly—not that he meant to do so, nor fancied the animal had the slightest chance, but out of pure contradiction. "Your friend must be a devilish bad judge to refuse such a horse as that!"

“You know best about his judgment,” answered the other, piqued at his companion’s tone, and aggravated, moreover, by the maid, who kept putting her head in to know when she might take away the breakfast things. “He’s more in your set than mine. All I can say is, that if young Brooke don’t know a racehorse when he sees him, he has lost a good deal of time in his apprenticeship, and paid a handsome premium besides for nothing!”

Multiple’s eye brightened, and his pink cheek grew a tinge pinker at the name.

“We’ve had his paper before,” said he, laughing, “and I don’t know that some of it was worth the stamp. But I hope you accommodated him, nevertheless. I know something of the family.”

“This bill was as good as a Bank-of-England,” answered Pounder. “It was indorsed by Mr. de Rolle, who is, I believe, in the same regiment.”

Multiple laughed again. He had thought it must come to this, though he hardly expected his advice would have been so quickly followed.

“That’s a new name, isn’t it?” he asked carelessly. “I don’t remember seeing it in the

market. My memory is pretty good in such matters, and so is my information."

"*I've* seen it on another bill," answered his partner, triumphantly, "and to accommodate the same party. The two seem to have been done about the same time. I suppose, if the gentleman is such a friend of Mr. Brooke, he won't last long."

Multiple ruminated. So rapid a one-two rather puzzled him. He resolved to get to the bottom of it. The best point in this man's character was that he never left his nut without cracking it.

"Where did you light on these bills?" he inquired. "They wouldn't need to travel much, with 'Rags,' as we call him, on the step."

"Mr. Brooke negotiated one of them himself. That was when I tried to make him take the horse. The other came to us with a good many more from Haman. They are dated within three days of each other. Except for that, they are precisely identical. The young gentlemen have been in mischief, I fancy; but that is no affair of ours."

"What is the amount of the first bill?"

"Three hundred."

“And the second?”

“Three hundred.”

“That’s a good lump of money in so short a time. Are they to be got at?”

“They’re both in the office at this moment. I can dispose of them without the slightest difficulty when I reach town to-day.”

“Keep them! my good friend, keep them!” exclaimed Multiple, with a quiver of repressed excitement in his voice. “Whatever you do, don’t part with them at any price. You see—you see—they may be of the utmost value to *us*.”

“I confess I do *not* see how they can be worth more than cash,” answered the older man with some surprise, “though I dare say they will be paid in full when they come due.”

Multiple was recovering himself. The nut seemed hard, but he was determined to crack it without assistance. He must give his partner a reason, though, for hiding it up, monkey-like, in his cheek, till he had leisure for the operation.

“Why, you see,” he remarked, confidentially, “six hundred is a good deal of money. Three he might have managed to pay up if he won a stake anywhere in the spring; but I know my man, and

I don't think he *could* hand over six hundred if he had it in his pocket. Then, of course, he will want to compromise. Very likely offer us a *post-obit*. His father can't live a twelvemonth at most. Those two bills might bring us in three times their value if we keep our hand on them."

"You know best," answered Pounder, sulkily, in a growl that seemed to contradict the assertion, and muttering something about "business" and "vagaries," under his breath.

"Then, you'll attend to my directions," resumed the other, in a matter-of-course tone. "Dear me! it's past eleven o'clock. I shall not be at our place at all to-day. If anything *very* queer turns up, write. Make my compliments to Mrs. Pounder. It's time for me to be off. Good-bye, Pounder. Don't forget to keep your hand shut on those bills."

Uttering these disjointed sentences, particularly the last, with an air of the utmost carelessness and good-humour, but in a tone which his listener knew by experience meant real earnest, Mr. Multiple took himself off, to the intense relief of his partner, his partner's wife, and his partner's children.

The more he thought over the matter, the

more he felt convinced there was a mystery of which something might be made. If there *was* a secret, that secret he was resolved to possess.

Unfortunately, however, this is the most fragile of all prey. To grasp a secret is too often like grasping a soap-bubble—the very act destroys, and renders it valueless. Multiple, however, was no clumsy operator. Above all, though he could make haste on occasion, he took care never to be in a hurry. He was human, too, although a gambler, speculator, betting-man, and money-lender; had his likes and dislikes; could take a languid interest in others so far as they acted on his own passions or feelings, and considered himself altogether a man of amiable disposition, but too sensitive to do himself thorough justice in the affairs of life.

Now, Helen Brooke's dark eyes and high-bred air, not devoid of a certain haughty shyness that became her well, had made a deep impression on Mr. Francis Multiple, none the less that his admiration seemed to produce a very opposite feeling in the young lady's breast. There are some men whom a woman's dislike *piques* into a strong desire for their capture; others, again,

who are only to be ensnared by an obvious predisposition in their favour, and who take a deal of "bringing on;" in fact, who require much of the love-making, at least 'in the earlier stages, to be done for them. These last are often the gentler and nobler natures, almost always the most constant; and although it may be up-hill work with them just at first, they warm to it very readily, and move fast enough when fairly set going. Women, of course, understand both kinds thoroughly, and each may rest assured that he will receive just so much encouragement as shall prevent his abandoning the chase in despair, and no more.

Now, Frank Multiple had been smitten with Miss Brooke's charms the very first day he set eyes on her near Dame Batters's cottage in the neighbourhood of Middlesworth. The sensation, without being novel, was keen and pleasing. It increased at the ball, and he paid the lady as much attention in his own unembarrassed way as circumstances would permit. The girl did not fancy him the least; but, like all sensitive people, she was very shy of wounding another by word or manner, and many compliments and civilities

passed unnoticed which would have earned for him—from Lady Julia, for instance—a very effectual set-down. There is a class of men in society, sufficiently numerous, and on pretty good terms with self, to whom the adage, “Silence gives consent,” seems an infallible maxim. Many a retiring damsel has suffered torture by “the question,” under the oppressive gallantries of these familiars, especially when the right man in the *wrong* place, being at the other end of the room, is thus prevented from a nearer approach, and, with the exquisite discernment and sense of justice peculiar to his sex, chafes and champs in jealousy and bitterness of spirit, unreasonably angry with *her* for what she cannot help. Then the forward gentleman gets the credit of being on the best of terms with the backward lady, and even persuades himself that his suit goes on prosperously. Nobody pities him much, however, when he is undeceived, as he is sure to be in the end, for the “real jam,” or what old-fashioned people call “true love,” triumphs at last in common life as well as on the stage; and where it exists, a word, a look, an allusion to the most indifferent subject, will bring people together as if they had never

been estranged, and could never have a difference again.

In the meantime, Frank Multiple admired Helen Brooke sufficiently to covet her for his own, and therefore made up his mind that she should become his property without delay. She was amiable, carefully brought up, ornamental, and well bred. The connection would be much in his favour: it would be another step gained on the social ascent; and this time there would be no dirt to wade through, only a pale, proud, spotless lily to crush beneath his heel.

He left the train, at Vauxhall Station, revolving many matters in his mind, amongst which the mystery of the two bills kept continually coming uppermost. Reflecting on the indorser's frank disposition and inexperience in such matters, he resolved to try what he could learn from De Rolle himself. It was possible the hussar might be in town. He would, at any rate, look for him at his club. Passing Mr. Plausible's Commission Stables, a happy thought struck him. He would ask Rags to give him his valuable opinion on a "stepper." If this arrangement should entail luncheon, he knew he could extract the

hussar's whole private history in less than two hours.

The hansom went bumping and bounding along alarmingly near the wheels of all other vehicles, and making no compromise whatever about grazing the kerb-stones, till it stopped at that great nursery of heroes which dominates so nobly over the rest of St. James's Square. Unheard-of fluke! Rags was in the club; and, stranger still, seeing that it was his especial duty to inform himself on such matters, the porter knew and admitted the fact. Hungry Rags had just ordered luncheon. Hospitable Rags was delighted to have a guest: the repast should be doubled forthwith, and laid in the other coffee-room. Nothing but great presence of mind in Multiple served to put a *veto* on champagne.

"Help you to see the 'Quad? Of course I will," said the host, heartily, and delighted with the job. "The very thing. Was just thinking what I should do this afternoon. Here comes luncheon! Have a cutlet? Drain of Bass first? Quite right: it's the real antibilious!"

The visitor was most welcome. Rags, like many of his comrades, was always rushing up to

town in a tremendous bustle, and had nothing to do when he got there. To one who has not "his London" at his finger-ends, a real thorough-going town man is an invaluable companion. Also, the hero-worship that never outlives a little experience of the world, bids ingenuous youth give its senior credit for much Satanic wisdom, and many vicious qualities of which it is beautifully innocent. Rags believed Multiple to be a second Corinthian Tom, with D'Orsay's manners, the worldly knowledge of all the Chesterfields in one, the brain of Talleyrand, the tongue of Faust, and the heart of Mephistopheles.

When men drink sherry after pale ale, at two o'clock in the day, and begin to talk about horses, they are apt to become confidential, discursive, and, indeed, a little indiscreet. Multiple drew his entertainer out with considerable skill. Another pint of sherry made Rags unusually loquacious.

"I've done most things now," said this honest fellow, wishing to impress on his friend that he was "at all in the ring." "Racing, hunting, sporting, soldiering; but what I like to go in for most, is society. Society, you understand me, old fellow—none of your second-raters, but the real

thing. Front rank — first-class, I mean — best blood, thorough-bred, you know, without a stain.”

“Exactly!” answered the other, gravely.—
“Duchesses, Countesses, and so forth.”

Rags, though bemused with sherry, blushed, well-pleased.

“That’s right,” said he. “You’re a man of the world, Multiple—you’ve seen it all. Don’t you agree with me? Nothing pays so well as what I call the first flight?”

“To a fellow with your advantages, I dare say it does,” replied his guest. “Though it’s hopeless work for a green one. I fancy *you* cut your wisdom-teeth before you were weaned; but for my own part, I cannot help thinking I began too young. Why, I knew Paris as well as I do Pall-Mall, at sixteen.”

“No!” exclaimed Rags, stricken with admiration at this beautiful instance of precocity. “Ah! There’s nothing like it, to teach a fellow what life really is!”

Multiple knew what this so-called life really was better than most people, and he might have told his friend, but he didn’t. He had experienced its feverish pleasures, its false excitement, its



discontent, its lassitude, its self-reproach. He felt too surely that the good was all gone out of him now; and though he regretted it, he had not even the desire for amendment. It is sad when vice, under the misnomer of pleasure, has become a daily necessity—when the mind has been so sapped and weakened by indulgence, that disease is its normal state. And this contemptible condition is what young men admire. Why is it that experience, even in wickedness, should possess such a charm for the untried spirit? Is it owing to the folly of youth, or the carelessness of middle age? Does the man wish the boy to wade through the mire like himself? or is it from sheer laziness, neglect, and fear of ridicule that he ignores or makes light of the stains on his own attire? The young ones are surely less to blame than those from whom they take their cue.

“So you’ve been at all in the ring, De Rolle?” said Multiple, after a pause, during which Rags had swallowed another bumper of sherry. “Getting tired of it, I suppose. *Blasé, ennuye*. Used up at five-and-twenty, eh?”

“Not quite that,” replied the other, delighted however with the imputation; “but I feel game

for a fresh excitement; something different from all I've tried before, you know."

"Have you ever won a good stake on the Turf with your own horse?" asked Multiple. "Seen Mr. de Rolle's colours flying past the chair on the outsider they laid twenty to one against before the race? That's not a bad moment, eh?"

"It's only a money excitement, after all," said Rags. "I'd rather win the Grand Military myself, if I could ride the weight, which I can't."

"I see," laughed the other; "you like something in which there is a more personal interest. Well, did you ever fight a duel, run away with another man's wife, or back a bill for a friend?"

"I've done the last," said Rags, idiot enough, I believe, at the moment to wish he could say he had committed the other two follies also. "I've done the bill," he repeated, "and, odd enough, do you know, it once happened to me to back the same bill twice over."

Multiple turned round to ask the waiter for a toothpick. "Indeed," said he, carelessly; "how was that?"

"Why, it was for a brother officer, you know.

Good fellow—great friend of mine,—man we all know. I name no names.” Rags looked very wise. “Soldiers aren’t always the best men of business. We made a mull of the stamp, and had to do it again. Good joke, wasn’t it?—all for want of practice.”

“I don’t think I quite follow you,” said Multiple. “I beg your pardon, I was looking at that woman in the street. You observed something about a stamp.”

“Only that I backed a second bill for my friend when I found the first was no use. That was the way we came to do a bill, as I told you, twice over.”

“You destroyed the first bill, of course, so it did not much matter. I dare say the thing happens every day.”

“Oh! yes. I destroyed it. At least, my friend did. He wrote to me at once to say he had put it in the fire. You know the man, though I won’t tell you his name. He’s a very honourable fellow. You can’t think how annoyed he was. It made him so angry that he never thought of returning the bill to me till it was too late. He tore it up at once, and burned it. Shows how

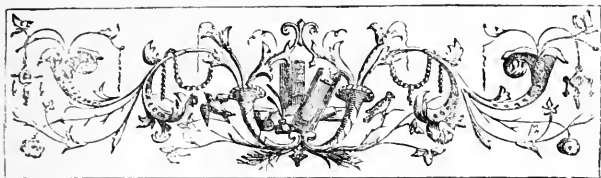
disgusted he was, for he's generally the coolest hand in the regiment."

"That's capital sherry, and I've had an excellent luncheon," said Multiple, provokingly uninterested, to all appearance, in his friend's anecdote. "Now for the *stepper*. I think you'll say he is very clever. Good gracious!" he interrupted himself, looking at his watch; "I shan't be able to go to-day, after all. Who'd have thought it was half-past three o'clock! Some other time, my dear fellow, I'll ask you to give me the benefit of your eye to make and shape. I must be off now, positively. Many thanks to you, De Rolle, and good-bye."

Mr. Multiple had got what he came for, besides the luncheon. He did not think it necessary to inflict himself with the companionship of honest Rags during the afternoon. That gentleman's conversation, though guileless, was neither instructive nor amusing. The hussar was a little disappointed, but at such a club as his there was no lack of comrades, jovial, cheerful, happy fellows, to whom headache, heartache, and indigestion were unknown. Was not Brown, the celebrated pig-sticker, having his weed after

“Tiffin” in the smoking-room? Were not Jones of the Plungers, and Robinson of the Engineers, and three or four lancers, and half-a-dozen of the hussar brigade ready to amuse and be amused in the hall? Rags had no difficulty in passing the day till dinner time.

Multiple proceeded straight to the office near the Strand. “Three hundred,” he muttered, as he walked along. “Three hundred, and not worth three hundred pence. Yet I wouldn’t take a thousand for it. No, nor ten of them; for this is the card that, if I play it right, will win me the stake I go for. Hurrah! for handsome haughty Helen, with the proud head and the large dark eyes!”



CHAPTER VIII.

THE LONG LANE.

JACK BROOKE went farming, without thinking it necessary to ask the Squire for any more contradictory directions. He crossed the park, and reached the accustomed stile, thence to strike a certain green lane, down which it was his habit to plod daily. A long lane indeed, and metaphorically as well as in reality—one that seemed to have no turning. It was something like Jack's own life. The way was easy to travel, confined between rural hedges, pretty and pleasant enough. The views from it, though not extensive, were smiling and peaceful. There was summer shade and winter shelter above his head, and a moderately

good road in either season beneath his feet. But no doubt there was a little too much sameness in the journey. Ups and downs, hill and dale, moor and moss make easier, or at least more cheerful, work than a dead level; and the smoothest path that ever was trod becomes wearisome, if a man follow it day by day. Jack fretted a little sometimes at the monotony of the groove into which he had been forced; but he would have been ashamed to confess a sentiment he held so unmanly as discontent, therefore he fought against it, and trampled it down, as only a good fellow can.

From his mother, the eldest Brooke inherited a rare quality of inert resistance, which had descended to neither brother nor sister. Perhaps he alone had been old enough to imbibe from her certain principles of resignation that she had found the great consolation and happiness of her life. Like many another, she had paid dearly for her one mistake; her one sin against her own heart, so fully avenged as soon as committed on that heart itself. Instead of fighting with her fate, and bewailing the sorrows that originated in her own deed, she grasped eagerly at the only hand able to help her, and so lived peaceful and contented, to

die hopeful and happy, before Helen was old enough to call plainly on "mamma." Jack not only resembled his mother in disposition, but looked back to her as his ideal of that perfection which he was never to see again on earth.

Of course, under these circumstances, he was destined to marry somebody as different as possible from his pattern.

Tatters trotted watchfully along before his master, darting off at intervals in pursuit of rabbits, with an energy none the less dashing that he had never in his life caught one above ground, and never would. He liked his expedition all the better that Jack had now left off riding a certain excellent cob, whose rapid paces used to reduce the poor little terrier, panting behind with its tongue out, to the last stage of exhaustion. But Jack had sold the cob in Middlesworth market, thereafter to come into the possession of Lord Waywarden, as imported direct from Wales, and nobody knew what had become of the money—five-and-forty pounds in Middlesworth notes—that he had taken for the sale. There was a mystery about these notes, for they did not find their way to Walter, nor did Helen wear a new dress out of any part of

them, and Jack was most unlikely to keep a secret hoard of his own.

Also, about this time, and soon after his brewery was burnt, George Stoncy received the same sum exactly, from an anonymous correspondent, to clear off a long-standing debt, of which he had no precise recollection.

So Jack, for want of a horse, strode sturdily along on a pair of well-turned legs, that carried their owner with considerable vigour and freedom ; but, alas ! black Care, not disdaining pedestrian exercise, had dismounted from the cob too, and walked beside him, offensively familiar still, whispering in his ear of a thousand difficulties he wanted to ignore, and reminding him of a thousand vexations he was trying to forget.

She had bothered him so much and so often about the farm, that he was waxing callous on that point ; and Walter's affairs, generally a fruitful subject for anxiety, seemed, notwithstanding Fugleman's death, to have taken a new and more prosperous turn, so she probed him with Helen, and made him wince and smart again, while he reflected on his sister's altered looks and lowered spirits of late. "Why is the girl so pale?" whis-

pered the hag, with her accustomed ingenuity. "So patient and apathetic now, content to spend whole days about her father's easy-chair, and forgetful of all her former amusements and occupations? Can it be that she thinks the Squire is getting worse, or is it that her own health is failing, from constant attendance on an invalid? There's something amiss with your sister, Jack—the girl you're so fond of, so proud of, that you think the fairest specimen of her sex in Europe, always excepting the French print in your bed-room. Suppose she, too, should be unhappy; suppose she, too, should have some secret sorrow, and be walking erect with the outward endurance of a Brooke, though

" 'The burden laid upon her
Is more than she can bear.' "

Goaded by his tormentor, Jack turned out of the lane, and crossed a tufted old pasture, sadly in need of draining, at the rate of six miles an hour. All his own troubles rushed in upon him at once, and he wondered what a woman *could* have to bother her. Then he thought of Walter's equal spirits under difficulties; of his brother's reckless-

ness ; of the temptations to which he was exposed ; and so thinking, he reached the end of the pasture, and looking over the fence, began to count some sheep folded in the next field.

He laughed, as he reflected what a poor job Walter would make of the daily business he took upon himself so contentedly ; but the laugh was neither honest nor cheerful, for he was thinking of a parable in which flocks and herds did not suffice a covetous magnate, who robbed his poor neighbour of the little ewe-lamb that “lay in his bosom, and was to him as a daughter.”

Jack looked up from his occupation to the wooded distance, behind which stood Tollesdale, and thought if *he* were Walter, he would not care to be the darling of so many, whilst a certain high-born damsel, graceful of gesture, and saucy of speech, with diamond eyes and chestnut hair, was willing to ride with him, waltz with him, flirt with him, perhaps—here the black hag put the probe in smartly—perhaps to *love* him. It was not strange that he should lose count of the sheep, and have to tell them by scores over again.

Suddenly, the poor frightened woolly creatures began to leap and bounce, and rush against each

other in a state of great confusion; for Tatters had gone off like a mad thing, yelping with delight, as he always did, when he heard the measured footfall of a horse, swinging along at a gallop.

It was the one temptation the dog never could resist, though in consideration of its dangerous tendency to equestrians, punishment and reproof had alike been tried to break him of the practice. Jack started in pursuit, and re-crossing the tufted pasture, saw, as a man sees with the corner of his eye, who is running at speed, a groom endeavouring to force his horse over a fence some one had evidently leapt before him. The more successful rider was already in the long lane Jack had recently quitted. Tatters, bouncing through the hedge immediately in front of a galloping horse, might be the cause of an untoward and dangerous accident. Jack, well aware by experience that hallooing was no use, kept his breath for a run over the pasture, and very gallantly he sped across the rough uneven surface. Very gallantly, too, he gathered himself to leap the fence into the lane, and came lightly over it like a hunter, stakes, and growers, and bank, and ditch, and all!

Then he stopped as if he was shot, and stood stock still, a living statue, blushing—blushing to the roots of his brown hair. Lady Julia Treadwell had pulled her horse up within three strides of him. How could he see in his confusion that her colour was nearly as deep as his own? How could he tell that she had watched him from the corner by the sheep-fold; that she was saying to herself at this very moment: “Well, he can’t *dance*; but, my gracious! can’t he just jump! yes; even in an old shooting-jacket and leather gaiters there’s something very noble, after all, in what I call a *man*!”

These smart, fashionable, ball-going London young ladies do not, I presume, divest themselves of their womanhood when they put on their *crinolines*. Strength and courage still constitute their ideal of the male, and I doubt if intellect can often hold its own with inches, while neither of them have the slightest chance in a match against pluck. Lady Julia knew a fine specimen when she saw one, as well as her neighbours, and she saw one now. Jack would have been there still if she had not spoken first. He felt quite giddy when she rode up and placed that pretty

hand in his. She had recovered her own composure by this time, and was in higher spirits than ever.

"No wonder you look surprised, Mr. Brooke!" she laughed out merrily. "You wouldn't guess in a month how I got here. I have brought Cockamaroo as straight as a line from Shotsdale, and made him do the boundary fence by the osier-bed in his stride. He *smudged* it awfully, but we got over without a fall! 'They *must* learn, you know; musn't they, Mr. Brooke? I don't think my groom will come out of that field to-night. Look—that's the fifth time he's ridden at the rails; and my horse made nothing of them. I shall be disappointed if he don't grow into the best hunter we have. I am sure when he heard your dog, he thought it was the hounds. Did you see me, Mr. Brooke; and didn't you wonder who it was?"

All this was to give Jack time to recover himself, but she took away his breath notwithstanding, sitting there so easily on her horse, in such a well-made habit, with such trim gloves, such a sweet little hat, such a dainty bit of collar under the pretty chin; above all, with the caressing

accent and the bewitching smile, that a vainer or less inexperienced man would have interpreted more truly ! He felt conscious that he looked like a fool. He stammered ; he smiled inanely ; he gasped ; he could find nothing better than to pat her horse's neck with his strong ungloved hand. He would have liked her to order him to lie down before the animal, that she might trample his life out beneath its hoofs ; but such an execution would not have suited Lady Julia at all ; and this was one of the rare cases in which a gentleman's confusion lost him nothing in the good graces of a lady.

It is possible that she prolonged it on purpose, for the diamond eyes shone down with kindly softened beams, and, though generally so intolerant of anything like awkwardness or want of confidence, this condescending damsel bent over the shy, handsome, ill-dressed young Squire with an air of tender interest that she never showed to the men of mark by whom she was habitually surrounded. Perhaps there was something in the novelty of the situation that amused her ; perhaps the love of sovereignty inherent in her sex was flattered by his obvious vassalage ; perhaps her woman's

heart thrilled to acknowledge the presence of the one being destined to become hereafter its treasure and its lord.

Jack stammered out a greeting of some sort at last. He never knew exactly what he said ; but had he been sure it was the most arrant nonsense ever spoken, he would not have had it back at any price, for it raised the sancy smile he thought so bewitching, and called forth the silvery laugh he had so often distinguished amongst a hundred other voices at the Middlesworth ball.

Lady Julia was in no humour to be critical, far less sarcastic ; and I doubt if it is possible for a man to hold a more favourable position than when he meets unexpectedly a lady who is kind enough to take an interest in him, the said lady having galloped herself into a high state of good spirits and good humour, on a young and not very tractable horse. She is conscious of looking her best, with eyes sparkling and complexion heightened by the exercise ; she is pleased with herself ; pleased with her horse ; pleased with her admirer ; above all, she has got her courage up, her energies into full swing, and feels that nothing can stop her now in whatever she wishes to accomplish.

Women are easily discouraged by reverses, but the other sex might well take a lesson from the dash and spirit with which they play a winning game. Lady Julia, so to speak, held "four by honours" in her own hand.

When a lady wishes to make the agreeable to a married man, she invariably commences conversation by asking after his wife, getting the ceremony over as soon as possible, and dismissing the subject at once. With a bachelor, again, if he have one, she displays extraordinary interest in his sister. This topic is fertile in personal allusions, and has none of the admonitory associations connected with the other. Lady Julia was determined to know all about Helen—her walks, her hours, her needlework, her garden, the school children she lectured, and the books she read.

"I *am* so fond of your sister, Mr. Brooke, and I see so little of her. Mamma calls her, 'My Swan.' She *is* as graceful as a swan, isn't she? I wish I was exactly like her. Why don't she ride? We might meet half way: wouldn't it be nice? I often ride to the cross roads at the end of the lane. I'm not above two miles then from Bridlemere."

“And I’ve walked to this field day after day for weeks, and never knew there was only the hill between us !” honest Jack blurted out, turning scarlet at his temerity immediately afterwards ; and adding, clumsily enough, “I suppose you generally ride over with Lord Waywarden or some of them from Tollesdale ?”

“Not I,” answered Lady Julia, with her ringing laugh. “Don’t you know, Mr. Brooke, that I’m fast, and independent, and audacious, and all that sort of thing, because, as Nethersole says, I ‘hang on my own hook.’ I’m sure you’ve heard people abuse me. I believe you agreed with them. But what’s a poor unprotected female to do ? Mamma never comes down till two o’clock, and papa, I feel, loves his farm better than his daughter. All farmers do. Don’t you love *your* farm, Mr. Brooke, better than anything else in the world ?”

Jack’s heart answered loudly, “I know what I *do* love, and how much I love it !” but the words would come no further than the roof of his mouth, where they seemed to stick. I can conceive, though, that his reticence did him no harm. If speech be woman’s privilege, surely silence is

man's prerogative. The former is often abused ; the latter rarely.

"Will you ask your sister to come and see me, Mr. Brooke?" (Jack, like his brother, thought the name sounded very soft and pretty as she spoke it.) "Mamma is so fond of her, and papa thinks she is a good example for wicked me. It is no use inviting *you* to come over, I know. I believe you disapprove of our doings at Tollesdale. I believe you're a hermit, Mr. Brooke, and hate everybody!"

He was quite sure he didn't hate *her*, as she smoothed and stroked her horse's neck where his hand had lain. He muttered something about being "very happy," and "his father's health keeping both his sister and himself a good deal at home."

"Then I must gallop over to see Helen," said Lady Julia, gaily. "I am determined we shall be better neighbours for the future. It's a charming ride—all grass; and except that one by the osier-bed, the fences are nothing for a hunter, if you like to come straight. Look at my groom, Mr. Brooke; did you ever see such a muff? He's got off to pull the rails down. Well, if I were a

man, I think I'd rather break my collar-bone than be beat like that !”

The servant had indeed dismounted, being a sensible fellow, when he found his efforts at coercion of no avail from the saddle. He was now engaged in the difficult task of holding a riotous young horse by the bridle with one hand, whilst he loosened a stout piece of ash timber with the other. So long as the animal was amenable, the rails refused to give; when the latter yielded a little, the former backed, and tried to break away. A few leisurely bullocks had already arrived to contemplate the proceedings, which promised, indeed, to be a work of time. Lady Julia laughed heartily. She did not care how long she sat on her horse in that pleasant lane, with Jack's honest embarrassed face at the level of her knee.

She had to find conversation for both, and no one was better qualified. Jack was too happy for talking. The warm flood of light that turns everything to gold, was dazzling his eyes, penetrating his heart, pervading his senses, and intoxicating his brain. That first moment of submission to the spell is the best, I fancy, in the whole series of

sensations, called up by love's white magic. It *must* come from heaven, for the evil one surely never could be permitted so powerful a charm. There is an Eastern superstition, which teaches that when Paradise was destroyed, one rose-tree alone remained, invisible, yet retaining its celestial fragrance ; that every human being is permitted, once in a lifetime, to taste its perfume. None can thus have an excuse for disbelief in a heaven of which the senses have assured them, if but for an instant ; yet those are happiest to whom Azraël proffers the rose, and even while they smell it, fetches them away.

It is worth the whole reaction to know that, however weak, however fallen, man can eat angel's food.

Lady Julia, however, could not sit motionless, gazing down in silence on her companion. It was all very well for *him* to stand there open-mouthed, drinking, draining the elixir every drop ; but in the inner as in the outer sense, though a man may bare his breast, and we need not turn our eyes away, a woman must drape herself with *les convenances*, which constitute, indeed, the stay-laces of her moral being. So the skirt of the

habit sustained a kick and a twirl to set it right, while the wearer thought of another safe topic for conversation.

“And your brother, Mr. Brooke—your pleasant good-for-nothing brother—what has become of him? We miss him dreadfully at Tollesdale. We haven’t seen him since I don’t know when. Not since he killed his horse at Oakover. I *was* so sorry for that poor horse. Do you know, Mr. Brooke, I cried when I saw him lying in the field with his back broke.”

Jack winced. His chin fell. The rose had been snatched from his face, and, indeed, the thorns tore him to the quick, it had been dashed so smartly away. Profoundly ignorant as he was of the seas into which he had ventured, of course, he mistook the lights, beacons, and other signals, intended for his guidance, and drifted, at the mercy of the winds and waves, aimlessly about in the dark. She read him as easily as her prayer-book, almost without looking at him, and she saw the blank disappointment come creeping over his face, chill and dismal, like a mist down the side of a mountain. She saw, too, the brave victory over self; the frank, chivalrous attachment that could

worship without return, without even hope ; the noble affection that could value her as a sister, though it might not cherish her as a wife ; and seeing all this plainly, Lady Julia turned her face away from the honest pleading, mournful eyes, and entreated with more kindness of manner than ever, that she might be permitted a closer inspection of that "love of a creature, Tatters!"

The dog was seized without difficulty. Indeed he had been walking round the leather gaiters, rather wistfully, jealous, as these sagacious animals are, of the person who engrossed his master so completely. They hate strangers themselves, and are justly impatient of that delight in new faces, which seems peculiar to the human race. Tatters growled audibly, showing the whites of his eyes, and an exceedingly sharp serviceable set of teeth, when he was lifted to Lady Julia's lap. He seemed to resent the indignity, and by no means to appreciate the advantage of his position.

"Well he *is* a love!" exclaimed her ladyship, taking his muzzle deftly in her kid gloves, and opening it with a twist that nothing but long practice could have attained. "I declare, if the roof of his mouth is not quite black! Ah, Mr.

Brooke, you're a happy man to possess such a dog as that. If it wasn't a sin to part a couple so fond of each other, I'd beg him of you on the spot, and ride home with him in my lap, all the way to Tollesdale!"

"Would you like to have him?" asked Jack eagerly. "I should be so happy to give him to you. I'll send the keeper over with him the first thing to-morrow morning. He's a good little dog, Lady Julia, and will turn away from nothing; besides, he's so well broke, and so attached."

"Now that's a man all over," said her ladyship, reprovingly. "You don't consider the poor thing's feelings one bit. How should you like it yourself? Is that the way you value true affection? Mr. Brooke, I'm ashamed of you!"

Jack coloured again, and felt embarrassed, for he did not quite know what to make of this playful tone; enjoying it exceedingly, yet entertaining sad misgivings that it must be set down to the familiarity of a sister-in-law. He looked from the dog to the lady, and thought how like, and yet how superior was the latter, to the print that always met his waking eyes in the bed-room.

It may have crossed his mind that life would be

too much happiness, if he could substitute the reality for the likeness.

Tatters, however, as is often the case with a third party in such meetings, found himself in a thoroughly uncomfortable and even false position. A lady's lap, if a delightful situation, has the drawback of being somewhat insecure. To a dog clinging by the folds of a slippery habit, on the inclined plane created by her attitude in the saddle, it can possess no charms whatever. Tatters, gazing wistfully at his master, looked as if he felt ridiculous, and whined to be released. Lady Julia laughed, and took pity on him.

"You've hurt his feelings, Mr. Brooke, poor little dog; and he'll be miserable now till you make it up with him. There, take him gently and set him down! So you were obliged to come round by the gate, after all! Well, now the horse has completely conquered. Perhaps you had better walk him about a little, till he is cool."

The latter part of this speech was addressed to the groom, who had ridden up somewhat crest-fallen at his defeat, yet consoled by anticipation of good cheer when he returned to Tollesdale, where he would entertain the audience of the servants' hall

with a full account of his young lady's vagaries, equestrian and social ; detailing what she *did* say, what she *might* have said, what she did *not* say, and drawing largely on his powers of fiction for the greater embellishment of his narrative.

How anyone paying poll-tax for servants can hope to enjoy the privacy dear to our national prejudices, is to me a perpetual marvel. Are they not at all seasons in the best possible position to watch his actions ? and can they find any topic of conversation so engrossing, as his vices, follies, meannesses, failings, and general imbecility ?

The groom knew his young lady despised him for his want of horsemanship ; but he knew, too, that the footmen, under-butler, and all the maids would listen delighted to his account of what befel during her ride ; so he touched his hat in silence, and began to walk his horse up and down, just within ear-shot of the two young people, much to the indignation of Tatters, who wanted to fly at him more than once.

"Then you'll tell Helen," said Lady Julia, without specifying the message more clearly, and leaving her hand in Jack's rather longer than is customary in wishing "Good-bye" amongst mere

acquaintances, probably to render her leave-taking the more impressive. "I shall have a charming ride back, and I will not lark over any more fences if you think I had better not." (Jack, in order to show that he valued it, had entreated her to take care of her neck.) "Good-bye, Tatters! I mustn't take you away from your master, because you love him so, you dear little dog! Good-bye, Mr. Brooke; stick to your farming. I shall tell papa that you are even fonder of grubbing about in the dirt than he is. What a nice lane for a gallop—and one ought really to have a gallop like this every day!"

So she settled herself in the saddle, gave her little white veil with its black spots a tug that brought it tighter than ever across her face, and cantered easily away on Cockamaroo, leaving Jack to gaze after her open-mouthed and spell-bound; half afraid, though it was broad daylight, that he might awake at any moment and find he had only been enchanted in a dream.

She looked back once (for her groom, of course) before the leafless hedges hid her from his sight, and then Jack gave one great, deep, long-drawn sigh—a sigh that expressed rapture, relief, anxiety,

devotion, a leavening of disappointment, and a full measure of strong, tender, unselfish, and unreasoning love.

He was in the hot fit just at present, and the cold had yet to come.

We ought not to lift a lady's veil and criticise the flush on her face as we do the unconcealed embarrassment of a man. Lady Julia rode on thoroughly and unreservedly happy. She had no fear of rivalry, no misgivings of inferiority—all that might come hereafter: now she had only room for this one conviction to fill her whole being, that Jack Brooke loved her. Jack Brooke, the only man she ever saw whose presence made her heart beat faster, and her colour rise. She was a quick, clever girl, practical enough in general, and intolerant of romance, knowing the world perhaps better than is good for one of her years. She had seen a deal of false coin passed, and had taken no little at its real value, but she acknowledged the ring of the pure metal when it was thrown down at her feet. She could not be mistaken now, she who had studied theoretically, both in books and in society, the symbols of our common weakness. He was shy with ladies, no

doubt—awkward even at times, and, she could not deny, generally ill-dressed; but it was something deeper, she knew, than shyness that shone to-day in those tender kindly eyes, and a man might be embarrassed to the verge of imbecility without betraying that wavering wistful discomposure which, like the tremble of the compass needle, indicates with certainty a magnetic influence sustained. As for his dress! What did it matter how you dressed the Apollo or the Gladiator? What could all the tailors in London have done for his exterior when he leapt that high wide fence so lightly into the lane? It was beautiful! beautiful! And he loved her!

She blushed beneath her veil from sheer pleasure at the thought; and then with the true unvitiated love came its invariable attendant, humility. "I'm not good enough for him," said the girl, to her own tumultuous heart. "Not half good enough. I pray Heaven to make me better."

She laughed at herself, too, more than once; the transformation could not but amuse her. It seemed so odd that she, the sarcastic, worldly, impenetrable Lady Julia Treadwell, whom half the men in London admired, and were afraid of

—whom the women of all ages called cold, and flippant, and heartless, bent only on social distinction, and preferring a Marquis to every one in the room, except a Duke, should have fallen in love like a milkmaid, without calculating the cost. What would Miss Prince say? How surprised she would be! And mamma? how provoked! Everybody would make a dead set at her, she knew, and that would only cause her to love him, if possible, ten times more than ever. Ah! it would never come to anything, of course; but nothing should prevent her treasuring the idea, hiding it up, and feeding on it secretly in her own heart. Already the first gush of delight was tempered with anxieties, uncertainty, misgivings. In these pleasant draughts, you see, the bitter flavour lies very near the brim. It seems a law of their existence that you are not to slake your thirst unchecked. The first touch of the cup against your lip is indeed rapture, but soon the bitter rises to mingle with the sweet, and renders perhaps every drop of the scorching beverage more precious still.

Lady Julia's groom was very hungry long before he reached the servants' hall at Tollesdale.

Luncheon had been over for an hour and more ere she rode up the western avenue, at a walk, with her head drooping and her rein lying loosely on her knee.

When she alighted from Cockamaroo she patted and caressed him more than usual, even touching his sleek swelling neck with her lips; then she went to her own room, and sat idle in an arm-chair, without taking off her habit, till it was nearly dark, forgetting even to drink her habitual cup of five-o'clock tea; and that such abstinence cannot but be injurious to the female system I am inclined to admit, because, notwithstanding her long fast, she had little or no appetite for dinner.

Her Ladyship, though she rode back so slow, must have been half-way home before Jack Brooke moved from the spot where they parted. He continued to gaze after her as if she had been a comet or some such celestial body, leaving a long luminous track of glory in its wake. Then he called Tatters to his feet, and, much to the astonishment of that wise little dog, who was unused to weak demonstrations, took him up and kissed him. Why a man of Jack's temperament should do anything so absurd I am at a loss to

conjecture: neither can I be supposed to know why Captain Raven dances quadrilles with sister Anne, when Blanche has one of her bad colds and mamma won't let her go to the ball: nor why young Rapid, who is flippant, not to say impertinent, with his seniors at our club, and will never listen to *me* for five minutes together, though my budget of news anticipates the evening paper—and when I tell a story I go scrupulously into details—why, I say, this hasty young gentleman sits contentedly for hours in old Proser's dining-room, listening patiently to his host's platitudes. Old P. is an unmitigated bore. His claret is as light as his conversation is heavy. Miss Proser, I grant, is an angel with its hair dressed; but then Miss Proser is upstairs playing melancholy tunes on the pianoforte in the gloom of the back drawing-room, wishing her papa at the —— well—at the club, we will say, or anywhere else, provided her swain were out of his jaws. Will they *never* ring that dining-room bell? Miss Proser frets even more than the guest, though he will come up after all, I hope, before candles are brought.

In the same way I cannot tell you why everybody who can get invited goes to Lady Vandal's

archery parties at Gooseberry Green. Is it the taste for shooting, do you suppose, or an honest love of Lady Vandal that brings gentlemen and ladies to her villa in such shoals? She never invites me to these parties, so how can I tell? But I hear that the butts, or targets, are scarcely twenty yards apart, and that not half a dozen people ever fit an arrow to the string. Why should they? The weapons they affect are for closer quarters, and conflict hand-to-hand. But Lady Vandal asking, as she does, nothing but nice people (whence, perhaps, my exclusion) is careful to ask those who think each other nice. Gooseberry Green, therefore, though contracted, dusty, overlooked, and an inconvenient distance from London, represents Paradise to several imaginative couples; and *dear* Lady Vandal is so indissolubly connected with each in the other's mind that both are almost in love with the hospitable dowager herself.

If you could see her, as I have done, in a morning dress, possessing, and indeed requiring, no crinoline, picking caterpillars off her currant-bushes, you would still more fully appreciate that power of association which sheds the charm of the

queen of flowers over something that "is not the rose, but has been near the rose!"

Tatters liked his master's caresses better than Lady Julia's. He frisked and sneezed and rubbed his nose against the turf, and scoured about in small unmeaning circles with the utmost delight. "Love me, love my dog," is an old proverb scarce complimentary to the true, devoted, incorruptible friend who goes about on four feet instead of two, but full of meaning notwithstanding. You kick the beast for its own sake, you caress it for its proprietor's; and some day, perhaps, you learn that the canine was the nobler nature, the stauncher, bolder, more unselfish heart. There is many a dog as deserving of an epitaph as Byron's. Many a man, I fear, who might write over the grave of his faithful partial follower the sad suggestive line—

"I never had but one, and here he lies!"



CHAPTER IX.

PRESSURE.

LOADED by his own thoughts, loathing his own society, and dreading of late to be left alone, Walter Brooke had become exceedingly restless, and even irritable, since the mishap that lost him his favourite horse. When off duty at the barracks, which was frequently the case at an out-quarter like Middlesworth, he generally galloped up to Bridlemere. The society of Rags had become distasteful, although that gentleman was slow to find it out, and indeed much gratified with the greater deference now paid him by his friend, attributing it to his own increased importance, and more intimate knowledge of the world. With

Multiple, however, Walter had struck up an intimate acquaintance. Something in this man's easy conventional tone, indolently ignoring everything that was unpleasant or laborious, half sneering at, half pitying those whose ideas soared above the low level of self-indulgence, he was pleased to call philosophy, seemed to soothe Walter's habitual irritation, and divert him from his own thoughts.

Multiple could be an agreeable person enough when it was worth his while ; and he grudged no pains now to obtain a permanent footing in his young friend's family, because he was playing a game of which the prize was extremely precious—until won.

The money-lender, though his business as such, owing to the activity of his partner, was known but to few, had many calls upon his time, and frequent occasions for paying flying visits to the capital, whence he returned, brimful of all the latest news and gossip. After one of these expeditions, he usually contrived to land first at Bridlemere, where he unpacked his budget and brought out his wares, in their full fresh bloom, as yet untarnished by the curiosity of Middlesworth. The Squire was

always delighted to receive him. For the poor invalid clinging helplessly to that world which was slipping out of his grasp, a guest was no mean prize, who arrived, as it were, with the *aroma* of St. James's Street clinging about his person; who could relate the very words used by the notabilities of the day "last night at Boodle's, or this afternoon at White's;" who spoke familiarly of great names, known only to his listener in the columns of a morning paper; and who could furnish the most authentic version of every public event, because he always "happened to know" somebody who was the best authority on the subject.

The end of the hunting season had arrived. Hedges were budding, grass was coming up fast; primroses and anemones carpeted the woodlands; daisies were getting their heads above the surface in the open. Two or three positively last days from the Duke had produced two or three disappointments, and one good gallop in the evening; but the Vixens had got through their trouble; the lambs were growing into sheep; the ground was too hard for pleasure, and it was high time to shut up. Racing men rejoiced in *their* opening season, and were already busied with the great Middles-

worth Handicap. Benedict, "well in," had come up to five to one.

All these considerations did Walter turn over in his own mind, while he rode his first charger, the only sound horse he had left, from the barracks to Bridlemere.

His position was now becoming day by day more precarious; and having but a straw to cling to, he grasped it like a three-inch hawser.

He had made up his mind that Benedict *must* win, simply because such an event could alone save him from ruin. He had "got on," as it is called in the jargon of the Ring; that is to say, he had backed the horse long ago, at something like twenty to one. Prudence whispered, now was the time to "lay off" a good deal of the money, and ensure a certain profit; but Walter was too deep in the mire to be extricated by any such cautious measure. No; a small stake could do him no good; a large one would save his commission. It had come to that. If the horse lost, he must sell out in order to face the settling, and then the remnant left would not suffice to meet even one of the bills Rags had indorsed. If that fraud was discovered, his character was irretriev-

ably blasted, and he was a ruined and dishonoured man.

Pleasant reflections for a sweet spring morning ! He cursed his generous, well-broken horse for swerving from a donkey at the road-side. He hated everything. He hated himself most of all. In such a frame of mind, it was a relief to overtake Multiple walking across the park in the direction of Bridlemere. The well-bitted charger accommodated itself at once to the pedestrian's pace, and the two friends, for such they had become of late, proceeded together towards the house.

"Cabinet Council to-day," said Multiple, full, as usual, of the latest news; "and an organized attack on the Government when Parliament meets next week. They were laying even money on a dissolution at the clubs last night. The Queen came up from Osborne, and goes back by the three o'clock train. Glaisher has smashed his balloon. There's a monkey with no thumbs at the Zoological. Consols are at 92 for the Account, and Benedict's broke down !"

Walter turned pale, and, with all his self-command, the moisture broke out on his forehead.

“Will he go for the race?” said he, in a quiet, measured voice, a little harsher in tone than usual. It was hard to guess by his demeanour that the news affected him so deeply; but his listener was accustomed to deal with these well-bred undemonstrative people, and he did guess it, if indeed he was not already sure of it from his own knowledge.

“They have not knocked him out of the betting,” he answered cheerfully. “He’s only gone down a point or two. The stable can’t afford to scratch him, I *know*, and go he will, if he comes to the post on three legs. I haven’t laid off a shilling of my own money, I can tell you that. He must win at the weights, if they can keep him fit, and I believe he has only hit his leg after all!”

Walter felt a little relieved, but he did not like it. He could scarcely conceal his vexation and anxiety. The other looked in his face for a moment, and then laid his hand on the charger’s neck.

“Excuse me, Brooke,” said he, with some feeling; “I trust you will allow me to consider you a friend, and to take a friend’s interest in your affairs. You’ve backed this horse heavily, I know.

Never mind *how* I know it. It's my business to learn almost everything that is going on. Mind, I *think* he'll win; but I needn't tell you it's a great field of horses, and there are two or three very well in, that we know but little about. If the thing don't come off, my dear fellow, I suppose it's no secret you will get a horrible 'facer?'"

"I shall lose a hatful of money," answered the other doggedly. "More than I like, if you mean that?"

"Of course, nobody likes to lose money," observed Multiple; "and when a man's liabilities are more than he can make good, he's in a very awkward not to say dangerous position." (Walter started in his saddle.) "It may happen to any of us, you know; but that don't make it a bit less disagreeable. My dear Brooke, will you allow me to talk to you as a friend?"

Mr. Multiple was opening the trenches, you see. So to speak, he was completing his first parallel. The early operations required quite as much caution as the subsequent advancement of the siege. He knew the value of an ally, and this, if he could get him, would be a precious one indeed.

"You're very good," answered the other, with

some suspicion, adding bitterly, "I'm sure I want one, and a stanch one, just now."

No man alive could have looked more sincere than Multiple, when he replied—

"I'll stick by you through thick and thin, Brooke; but it's no use disguising, you've got some very rough weather before you. Unavoidable expenses, possible losses, difficulties about ready money, perhaps a bill or two coming due." Here he paused to give his so-called friend the full benefit of the thrust, and satisfied himself the while that his fieldworks were advancing rapidly. "Promotion, it may be, to purchase, to say nothing of the thousand dribblets in which money is always filtering away. We might help one another, Brooke, though, if we pulled in the same boat. But, first of all, I've a scheme for you I was thinking of the whole way down in the train. You're a good-looking fellow, pleasant in society, popular with the women. Why don't you marry?"

"I've never been asked," replied Walter, demurely; adding, however, "I've thought of it, too, more than once. I'm afraid it's the only way left. Did you mean me to marry anybody in particular, my good fellow, or to pick from the

lot, and take the best? Hang it! she must be a lady, though. I couldn't afford to drive a half-bred one!"

Multiple set his teeth, and smiled. On his face was the expression of a man who has captured something that writhes, and moans, and struggles, but that he is determined not to set free.

"I know a lady as thorough-bred as any in England, with plenty of money too, that the world says would marry you to-morrow if you asked her. Give her a chance, man, at least, of saying 'No.' She don't live far from here. Do it this afternoon!"

"I suppose I can guess what you mean," answered Walter; "but I don't think old Waywarden would stand it. I've nothing to settle on her but myself. Valuable, no doubt, but not convertible, you see."

"Waywarden will do whatever she tells him," said the other. "A man with an only daughter always does. I believe he thinks there's nobody worthy of Lady Julia, and he'd grudge giving her to one fellow just as much as another."

"It's not a bad idea, Multiple," said Walter.

"I've often thought before that it might pay. There's the mother, though. I'd forgotten *her*. She'll settle *my* business, I know, in two words. I think I see her face when they talk about anything less than a Duke for Ju!"

"The mother's the best friend you've got," answered Multiple. "Depend upon it, a woman who has been such a beauty as Lady Waywarden don't like going about with a grown-up daughter. Nethersole is still at Eton, and a precious stupid young dog I hear your future brother-in-law is, Brooke. If Lady Julia was married, people would forget the mamma had a daughter. She'd fancy herself quite young, and begin going about again."

Here Multiple fell into an error very common amongst men of his calibre who are *in* what is called the best society without being *of* it. They are apt to lay down conventional rules for the conduct of a class with which they are not intimately acquainted, drawn from what they imagine they would themselves do if similarly situated. These maxims are, for the most part, fallacies, grounded on a narrow view of human nature, and ignoring most unphilosophically the obvious fact

that in civilized nations the highest and the lowest ranks are least of all impelled to repress or dissemble their real feelings.

Walter, though with far less experience, knew better; but men are easily persuaded of what they wish, and he only observed in a languid tone, "I suppose I'd better not say anything about settlements!"

"Settlements," repeated his friend, thoughtfully. "I think I can advise you what to do even when it comes to that. Insist that everything shall be settled on the lady herself. Vow that you know nothing, and care less about the money part of the business. Declare you won't touch a penny in the event of her death; that you can't bear to talk about it, and feel you wouldn't survive her a week. Then wind up with your own expectations, your father's intentions, his bad health, the unlikelihood of your brother ever marrying, adding that nobody is half good enough for *her*, and inferring that *you* are better than any one else."

"Why, you do it so well you must have been practising on your own account," laughed Walter. "Are you going to put your foot in it too, old

fellow? Do you want to see me in the same mess as yourself?"

"If I did, I hope you would back me up as well as I have backed you," answered Multiple, with a covert smile. "Fair play is a jewel, and I think you ought to promise me that."

"Of course, of course!" said the other, carelessly; adding, "Here we are at the house, and Helen, by Jove, ready dressed for a walk. Go in and do the civil whilst I take this horse round to the stable."

Multiple was delighted to comply. Having established himself on a sufficiently familiar footing at Bridlemere, he lost no opportunity of making the ground thoroughly good that he had already gained. He wished to glide insensibly, but surely, from the pleasant acquaintance into the trusted and confidential friend. That character he hoped to change eventually for something more closely connected still; and Helen's manner of late had given him some encouragement, the more acceptable from its contrast to the obvious dislike with which she had received him at first.

The truth is, that living as she did so much

alone, and in constant attendance on her father, the society of an agreeable, intelligent man could not but be an acquisition. Now, Multiple had a fund of every-day information, which, when he chose, he could impart in a pleasant, easy manner that enchanted the Squire, and amused his daughter. Helen required, just at present, what the French call a *distraktion*, and anything was to be caught at that took her out of her own thoughts. She began to miss Multiple's anecdotes the days he was detained in London, and to look for his arrival, with his budget of news, as an event in the uninteresting *routine* of her life. She also had to stand up for him against Jack, that gentleman, though usually unprejudiced, having taken a strong dislike to his brother's new friend. "He's not the right sort, Nell," he would say to his sister, in moments of confidence, at her flower-beds or amongst her plants. "I don't know what it is about the fellow. He's decently behaved, I allow, and disgustingly civil, but somehow he's not all right, Nell. Hang him! with his curls, and his rings, and his soft white hands; I should never be surprised to hear he was a ticket-of-leaver!"

Of course, defending a man causes a lady to look more leniently on his faults. Neither is it against his interest that she should seldom see any one else, except her brothers, in the shape of a gentleman. By degrees Helen came to consider Mr. Multiple an obliging, accommodating person, rather amusing besides, and to opine there might be some good in him if only anybody would take the trouble to bring it out. Therefore, when he was ushered into the library, where she sat by her father, she gave him her hand with a pleasant smile and a cordiality of manner that in so quiet a lady was extremely reassuring.

The Squire had eaten his early dinner, and gone off into his usual afternoon doze. He slept so sound that the visitor's entrance failed to wake him. The conversation, therefore, had to be carried on in whispers so as not to disturb the invalid, and this restraint also gave a character of friendly intimacy to the meeting.

Helen was dressed for a walk—small hat, slender boots, striped petticoat, and well-fitting gloves, as before. The costume reminded Multiple of the first time he met her, several weeks ago. His heart swelled with triumph when he thought

how well he had used the intervening period, and what a game he had before him if he only played it out.

He loved her, you see, after his own fashion, as the wolf loves the lamb, the eagle the kid, the Turkish Pacha his last pink-checked, hazel-eyed, auburn-haired purchase from the Circassian dealer. Nay, perhaps his love was keener than any of these, for it was dashed with a stinging sense of inferiority that strengthened his efforts with all the energy of revenge, and imparted a diabolical zest to his anticipations of the triumph he had resolved to win.

Miss Brooke loved both her brothers as a well-conducted young woman should. She had promised to meet Jack this afternoon on his way home from the farm, and that walk would be the one treat of her whole day. She pined for the fresh air, too, for its own sake, as those do who spend most of their time in a sick-room. She thought it hard that their visitor's arrival should deprive her of this necessary indulgence. She wondered what Walter was about that he did not come to her relief. The Squire's servant was at the door, waiting to take his usual turn of attend-

ance, and the afternoon was wearing away fast. It would be rude to desert her guest ; but there could surely be no harm in asking him to accompany her part of the way, and leaving a message for Walter to follow. Multiple ought to have known by this frank proceeding that she could hardly be in love with him. The proposal, however, in order not to wake the Squire, had to be made and accepted in a whisper. Multiple felt like a winner as they emerged together from the hall-door, and took their way across the park, winding in and out through the old elms, crushing the dank, brown fern beneath their feet, and disturbing the deer only enough to make them stare attentive, shake their heads, and move stately on to continue browsing in another glade. He knew right well how such warfare should be waged, and, notwithstanding that his feelings were really interested, never lost his head for a moment : so he talked on indifferent matters while they were in sight of the windows, and was only a little graver and quieter than usual. Presently, getting further into the solitude of the park, he grew silent. She remarked it, wondered what was coming, and walked rather faster in conse-

quence. He broke through his reserve abruptly. He wished to startle her, and succeeded.

“Miss Brooke!” said he, “I am placed in a very awkward position. I require your sympathy and assistance.”

The large dark eyes turned on him with an expression of unfeigned wonder; but his manner, though agitated, was respectful, even deferential; and Helen, with all her shyness, had no lack of courage. The two qualities, indeed, often go together.

“I am scarcely equal to advising, far less assisting, a person of your experience,” she answered calmly, adding, with a smile, “My sympathy, I fear, will do you but little good.”

“It is all I ask for, nevertheless,” said he, tenderly. “If I knew what you wished me to do, I should have less difficulty in making up my mind; at least, I should not scruple for a moment in yielding my own opinion to yours. I hope you will give me credit so far, Miss Brooke.”

“I do not think I quite understand you,” she replied, a little puzzled as to what the man could be driving at, for Multiple was too old a player to show his hand at the commencement of the

game—but wondering also why Walter had not overtaken them, and wishing that Jack would speedily break the *tête-à-tête* by returning from the farm.

“I am in possession of a secret,” said he, frankly, “affecting the honour of a family for which I have the greatest regard. Indeed, for certain members of that family I should be proud to make any sacrifice they might require. To conceal my knowledge of this secret, places me in the position of one who participates in a crime. To disclose it would entail utterly and irremediably the social ruin of my friend. Miss Brooke, this is my dilemma. Help me out of it.”

“*Fais ce que dois, advienne ce que pourra!*” answered Helen, proudly. “I should think a man’s own honour was the best guide on such occasions as these.”

He looked at her with a pitying admiration she remembered, and was grateful for afterwards.

“If we could stick to that maxim,” said he, gently, “it would be better for us all. In this case, I should have to bid my friend good-bye, and must make up my mind to see him lose his position, his profession, his acquaintance, his

future, his good name, everything that makes life worth having. I could not bear him to be pointed at for a swindler; and yet, if I do not screen him, this must be the result. Oh! Miss Brooke, speak a word in the cause of mercy! You must have perceived long ago that with me your will is law."

Helen was getting very stately and a little frightened.

"Forgive me again," she said, coldly, "for remarking that I cannot see how all this affects *me*. Shall we turn back, Mr. Multiple? Those clouds look very like rain."

He changed his manner now for a graver and sterner air, stopping short to face her while he spoke.

"It so far affects you, Miss Brooke," said he, "that the action I deplore was committed by a person who is very near and dear to you, and of whose honour you are as tender as of your own."

She turned deadly pale, trembling all over, and, scarcely conscious of the action, sat down on a fallen tree, and looked up in her companion's face with a mute, piteous agony that seemed helplessly to await the blow.

"That person," continued Multiple in the same

tone, "has robbed his intimate friend of a large sum of money, several hundreds, by a trick combining palpable misrepresentation with actual fraud—by something which, if not in a judicial, is, at least, in a social point of view, tantamount to forgery. That person has placed himself without the pale even of those whom the world conventionally calls honest men, and that person is—forgive me, Miss Brooke; Helen, forgive me—your brother, Walter Brooke."

A little broken cry; a moan as if she had been suddenly stricken to the heart, escaped her. Then she sprang to her feet, and on her pale fair face was written scorn, defiance, indignation, and a strange wild gleam of relief. It was not her brother's name she had feared to hear from those stern unsparing lips; she faced him as a man faces another whom he is about to strike; nay, she clenched her slender hand and spoke out in loud, full, vehement tones. "It's a lie," she said, "a base and slanderous lie! You dared not have told him so yourself. Is it gentlemanlike, Mr. Multiple? Good heavens! is it *manly* to come to me with this false, abominable tale? I am only a girl, a weak girl, so you are safe enough; but if I

were half as strong as my brothers you—you—would be down there on the grass, at my feet.”

“I wish you *would* strike me,” said he, very sadly, “for I feel too keenly what a cruel blow I am inflicting on you. Miss Brooke, strike, but hear me. Do you think, *can* you think, I entered on this painful subject to give you annoyance? You, for whom I would do anything, suffer anything, forego anything. Whom else can I consult? Would you have me go to the Squire, to Sir Archibald, to your elder brother, himself the soul of honour, though he scarce does me justice? I *must* mean well, Miss Brooke, when I could run such a risk as this of offending *you*.”

Of course, her tears were beginning to flow. The reaction had come on, and she gave him her hand almost penitently. In her agitation she hardly knew, when she withdrew it, that he had put it to his lips.

“Forgive me,” she said. “Mr. Multiple, I had no right to doubt your friendship. I will endeavour to listen calmly. Surely there must be some explanation. It cannot, it CANNOT be true.”

“I have the proofs, Miss Brooke,” he replied, in the same sad sympathizing tone, “and I am but

too thankful they have fallen into my hands. Were I the only person in the secret the matter would be simple enough. Unfortunately, there is another individual concerned. One with whom I have had many dealings in money matters—grasping, covetous, unscrupulous. His silence must be purchased; and I cannot hope that any of the feelings which influence me will have the slightest effect on *him*.”

Shattered, surprised, agitated as she was, Helen collected herself with an effort, and asked calmly for a detailed statement of the accusation against her brother, listening to Multiple’s account with fixed attention, and putting here and there such questions as showed she escaped none of the pain it caused her from being bewildered by the blow.

Multiple, of course, gave his own version, varying but little, however, from the actual facts that had come to his knowledge. When he arrived at the discovery of the two corresponding bills, and his subsequent conversation with Rags, she stopped him.

“You have got them both,” she exclaimed. “Mr. Multiple, for all our sakes, for *my* sake, you

will keep them in your own possession at any sacrifice !”

“For *your* sake, Miss Brooke,” he answered, once more taking her hand, “I will spare one who is dear to you, though in so doing I am within a hair’s-breadth of compounding a felony. The other person I mentioned is under obligations to me ; that is to say, I hold his bond for large sums of money. By cancelling the debt I can purchase his silence. Understand me, Helen Brooke, to do this I must sacrifice half my fortune, and I will do it only for *your* sake.”

She looked about her scared, turning her head from side to side like a wild animal caught in a trap. She had time even in that helpless, wretched moment to review the whole details of the position. To imagine her father’s sorrow and its certain effect on his health should this great disgrace be ever brought to light. Sir Archibald’s agony of shame—Uncle Archie, the soul of honour, the chivalrous, scrupulous gentleman to whom the mere suspicion of a stain would be humiliating as a blow. Jack’s utter despair when he lost his faith in his brother. He would feel it, she knew, even more than she did ; and poor Jack had so

much to grieve, so much to worry him. Of Walter himself she could not bear to think. Nor was this the worst—the reputation of their family was endangered; the escutcheon they cherished so proudly was threatened with defacement. At all risks, ay, at every sacrifice, the honour of the Brookes must be preserved.

Could she misunderstand the nature of this friendly intervention, the price demanded for his assistance, who was walking so quiet, so respectful, yet so uncompromising, at her side? He seemed resolved there should be no misconception of his meaning. They were standing together near the fallen tree, her hand was again in his, and rested there passively, for she was quite unconscious of his touch. Though not a drop of rain fell the clouds had gathered dark above their heads, and she saw everything about her curiously distinct and in detail, yet through a strange lurid light, as though the atmosphere were tinged with saffron hues. Even the bare forked branch of a distant tree against the sky arrested her outward attention with a persistency that was almost distressing, though her real inner self, as she knew too well all the time, was a long way from here,

and far back into the past. Her face was white, even to the lips, and her delicate features quivered and worked painfully, but she set the small teeth hard, and bore her head up nobly with a defiant courage that could not have been surpassed by the first Sir Geoffrey beset amongst the Ironsides at Naseby, striking dogged and desperate for God and for the King. Her companion did not look her in the face, his own eyes flashed and sparkled, but he kept them on the ground; his cheek was flushed and glowing, his frame trembled with delight and triumph, and intense passionate longing, which he dignified with the name of love. His arm would fain have stolen round her waist, but instinct itself told him this was no time for such familiarity, and it was but a cold gloved hand he pressed once more to his burning lips. while the stern brief accents in which he urged his suit grated harshly on her ear,

“Miss Brooke! Helen! Speak! Is it agreed?”

“Agreed,” she repeated, and let him take both her helpless hand in his, and bent her marble forehead once to meet his kiss. And so Frank Multiple and Miss Brooke were engaged.

Engaged! Alas! She knew too well what it

meant. It meant a new life, new interests, new duties, the charge of another's happiness as well as of her own. All that is most enticing and most precious to a woman's heart, with its keen desire for appropriation, when glorified by love, all that terrifies and depresses it most when expediency rather than inclination has forged the handcuffs. Ah! the grim iron strikes chill to the bone bare of its silken covering. True that with many of us the silk wears through ere long, but still the limbs have got used to the fetter, and callous to its touch. I pity no dreamer's disillusion, for it is the condition of his dream, but it is hard to forego the dream altogether. Not even in fancy to have basked in the magic beams. It is bad enough to lose the luminous phantom that so dazzled all our senses, but worse still never so much as to have seen it glide from within our grasp.

Helen must give up home and kindred now. Was it this reflection that seemed to weigh like lead about her heart? I think the sacrifice she felt most keenly was not of the real but of the impossible. I think she had cherished a vague longing for that which could not be, so she had taught herself to feel, and prized the vision more

because her reason told her it must never reach fulfilment. Now that her own act had destroyed every vestige, it did not seem so impracticable after all. Why must she be haunted by that figure walking thoughtfully across the park, pausing amongst the trees to look its last upon the house, and then turn sorrowfully away? Why must she see a girl with a pale face and dark hair pushed back, on her knees, in a deserted room, weeping, longing, praying? And how had the prayer been answered? She could not, she must not, she *dared* not think of it now.

She turned to her affianced husband and wondered how she ought to feel towards him. Was this heavy, hopeless, grudging effort at gratitude a return for his devotion? Had he not offered her his all, and was it not accepted? She shuddered and sickened to think how little she could give him in return.

They were going home now, for like a wounded forest creature she had instinctively set her face that way, and he walked by her side grave, triumphant, scheming even then, thinking less of her youth, her beauty, her maiden dignity, her gentle loving heart than of his own ambition, and

the great stride he had to-day accomplished in that which he considered the journey of life. Sometimes, though, he glanced at the slender feet that stole in and out beneath the gaudy petticoat, and then his dark cheek flushed warm, and his down-cast eyes sparkled and glowed with a lurid light.

They spoke but little, and on indifferent subjects. Since they had agreed to become one, a wall seemed to have risen between them, and, strange to say, he felt the restraint more irksome than the girl. Perhaps her great distress left no room for so petty a sensation as mere discomfort. Their situation was not the least what either of them had expected, and if Jack Brooke coming back from the farm could have overtaken the engaged couple it would have been a great relief to both.

Perhaps the sight of her old home gave her courage ; perhaps she felt that a last effort must be made ; not at escape—no, that was now impossible—but for a reprieve. They were almost at the door when she turned full upon Frank Multiple, and said in a calm measured voice that surprised herself, “ I have one request to make that I think you will hardly deny me. Our bargain—

our engagement, I should say—must not be declared to-day. You know my father's state of health. You must leave *me* to decide on the fitting time for asking his approval. Do you consent?"

He tried to answer playfully, fondly, to affect the raptures proper on such an occasion, but the phrases would not come, and though he was provoked at his own cowardice, he shrank from meeting her eye. He made a weak snatch at her hand, an awkward futile effort to detain her, but she passed on as if unconscious of his presence, and walked upstairs with a slow and stately step to the door of her own chamber. God help her when she got there! It would have been a brave man who had followed her across the threshold.

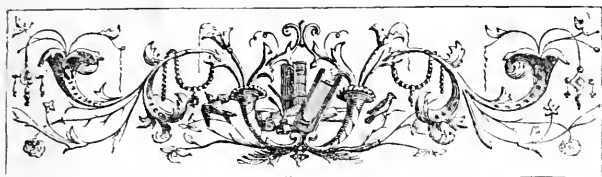
And Multiple, left standing at the hall-door, ground a curse savagely between his teeth, then looked up as if relieved by her absence from unbearable restraint, pulled out a gorgeous cigar-case, embroidered by hands less pure than Helen's, but perhaps no less kind and gentle in a cause they loved, and lighting it paced up and down the gravel, and spoke to his own heart in bitter, malicious, measured syllables. "We shall see, my

fair proud lady. We shall see. Your turn to-day ; mine to-morrow. Love me ! Why should she ? I have had enough of that folly ; but I know something better than such child's play, and I think, considering all things, I have not bought my bargain too dear. She called it a bargain herself. Do you think *that* escaped me, my lady ? If you do, you'll find yourself d——d well mistaken when we come to settle accounts. I'll have that haughty high-born beauty of yours all for my own. Why, that alone is worth more than I need give Pounder to hold his tongue. I'll have that cold white forehead down, down to the very dust ; and as for your heart, curse it, let it break if it won't bend ; for you're mine now, body and soul, and, by heaven ! you shall find it out. And yet, and yet—Blast her ! I wish she would love me a little, were it only for half-an-hour.”

Then, as the tobacco asserted its soothing influence, his countenance brightened, his swollen features regained their usual composure. He never acted on impulse, though his passions were naturally violent. He was a little ashamed of his late outbreak.

“What a fool I am,” said he, laughing honestly

enough, "to put myself out for nothing. What would a fellow have? Here I am with the game in my own hand, winning every trick, by Jove, and my deal."



CHAPTER X.

RECOIL.

THERE are all sorts of wooers in the ranks, from buxom May to bleak December. Some men, like Don Quixote, take the matter *au grand sérieux*, and to such, indeed, the important question must constitute an awful moment of their lives. Others again, Irishmen, I believe, especially, rejoicing in a wonderful mixture of good faith, *bonhomie*, and that reckless audacity which they affirm to proceed from constitutional shyness, request a lady to marry them with an easy affability, just as they would ask her to dance ; and seem as little affected by acceptance or refusal in the one case as in the other. Levity, indifference, and the gaiety of an untouched heart, have doubtless their advantages.

To a looker-on they generally seem secure of the game ; but women, I imagine, must have some secret test, by which they ascertain the value of a suitor's professions, distinguishing the ring of the true metal from the jingle of the false. Though not always wise enough to act upon it, they are seldom misled by this mysterious instinct ; and my own belief is, that each of them knows exactly what you think of her the very first time she sets eyes upon you. It is this intuitive perception of our weakness that gives her such advantage in a contest, like most others, gained by the mistakes of an adversary. I cannot quite subscribe to the maxim, that "Faint heart never won fair lady." I think if she cares to be won, it must be a very faint heart, indeed, to which she will not give enough encouragement to make it go in for the prize ; whilst, although persistency and good-fortune, or in other words, opportunity and importunity may do a great deal, they are not infallible, and that "one refusal," which is proverbially "no rebuff," may, on repetition, grow to be a very decided ebullition of hatred and disgust. Sir Dinadam, in the old chronicle, with his "jests and japes," his far-fetched witticisms that made Arthur

and Guenevere laugh so heartily they “might hardly endure to sit upon their chaires,” with his *débonair* bearing, and his courtly glance roving free from dame to damsel, but settling fairly on none, might, indeed, win smiles as many as he broke lances; but I doubt if the whitest bosoms in the court of the “Blameless King” heaved sighs so deep for him as for love-lorn Tristrem, or for Lancelot, the brave, the gentle, and the saddened; eating his own heart in utter silence; looking “stol’n wise” on one he might never claim; wrestling with the passion, so sweet though guilty; so hopeless though returned; that was alike her punishment and his own.

Not a paladin of them all, however, had he risen straight from the wine-cup at the round table, could have galloped off a-wooing more gaily, than did Walter Brooke, out of the stable-yard at Bridlemere in the direction of Tollesdale. Multiple’s advice sank deep, encouraging as it did the hopes he had now cherished for some time. He was not a man to let the iron cool before he struck it, and ere his companion had entered the house, and made his bow to Helen, the hussar had changed his mind about spending the afternoon at home. He

turned his unwilling charger from the stable-door, but that good horse no sooner felt the soft elastic turf beneath his feet, than he broke into an easy gallop, seeming to participate in the hopes, as in the haste, of his rider.

There are some expeditions that must be undertaken in a hurry, or not at all. If a fortress is to be carried by a *coup-de-main*, it will not do to waste time in lengthening the ladders and measuring the ditch; better run in and force the position pell-mell. If you mean to ride at water, the sooner you set about it the better for man and horse; the longer you look, the less you will both like it. And if you want to marry an heiress, you should ask the question, and press for the answer at once, lest a livelier suitor cut in before you, and give you the candle to hold while he walks off with the game.

Walter never slackened pace till he saw the square, substantial front of Tollesdale mansion-house looming through its surrounding woods, suggestive of wealth, and station, and domestic comfort, and all that a man who is *not* in love connects with matrimony. Even then he would have galloped to the very threshold, but that pass-

ing the double doors of a deep well-littered farm-yard, he was brought up by the cheerful voice of his prospective father-in-law.

“You seem in a hurry, Walter,” shouted Lord Waywarden, interrupting his occupation to stop his friend. “You needn’t fear to be late for luncheon in *that* house, as long as my lady is at home. Why, man, you send him along as if you were riding to catch hounds!”

His lordship was over his gaiters in the rich yellow straw. His farm-book was under his arm, his pencil between his teeth. He was engaged in the congenial operation of poking and punching a fat bullock about the tail, to ascertain the beast’s chance of an agricultural prize. He invited Walter to dismount, and inspect the Leviathan.

“Not his legs, my good fellow; not his legs,” exclaimed his lordship, laughing heartily at the gravity with which Walter, who was not without a certain dry humour, took his gloves off, and proceeded to pass his hand down the animal’s sinews below the knee. “Do you suppose I’m training him for the Middlesworth Handicap; or if I were, do you think he looks as if he could win? Perhaps you would like to have a saddle on him, and feel

his action round the paddock? Come, you'll be none the worse for a lesson about stock. We'll go round the pigs. I've a black sow I should like to show you, that's as sure of the gold medal as if she had it round her neck. Look at her! Fair Rosamond, my bailiff calls her. There, I think, you'll allow I have bred a beauty at last!"

Fair Rosamond, who was all throat and paunch, with a delicate little snout and eyes choked in fat, gave no symptoms of vitality beyond a stertorous snore, and looked, indeed, as if she must die of sheer apoplexy before the day of the show.

Walter asked meekly, whether it would be necessary to feel her too?

Lord Waywarden's cheery laugh rang once more amongst the very rafters of the out-buildings.

"You'll never make a farmer," said he, "and I suppose you don't want to learn. But having caught you down here, it would be scarcely fair to give you a benefit, particularly as you take to it so kindly. You *must* have come to ask for something, Walter. I never knew a fellow give another a leg on to his hobby, unless he wanted something out of the rider."

Lord Waywarden spoke jestingly, of course. He

imagined that his young friend might require some little favour connected with fishing-rights, pheasants' eggs, the dry-nursing of fox-hound puppies, or any one of the thousand little matters in which country gentlemen can be of service to each other. He was something more than surprised when Walter told him, in a few modest but out-spoken words, the object of his visit.

Something more than surprised, yet not altogether displeased. He liked the hussar, personally, none the worse—knowing him to be a bold rider, and a good shot—for certain little affectations of dandyism, that reminded him of his own youth. He approved of the connection with near neighbours, and a family so influential in the county. He had a vague suspicion, too, that Julia was fond of him; and this would have outweighed almost every other consideration in his lordship's mind. The boy had nothing, of course; *nothing*, with Lord Waywarden, might have meant anything under two thousand a year; but he had always understood Sir Archibald would make him his heir; and Sir Archibald, everybody said, must have saved enormously! In the meantime, he must stretch a point for Julia. After all he had but

Julia and Nethersole in the world. Besides, he was pleased with the manly, though diffident, tone in which his consent had been asked ; and approved highly of the suitor's honourable conduct in appealing to the father before he addressed the girl.

Walter, who had played this, his last card, with something of the gambler's desperation, could hardly believe his ears, when my lord bade him go up to the house, and try his luck with my lady.

"I don't mean the thing's settled, my boy," said he, grasping the young man's hand ; "but I *do* mean, that if you can get my lady's consent, and Julia is willing, of course, I'll take it into consideration, and see what can be done. You're both quite young, you know, and can afford to wait. Probably, for that very reason, you're in a devil of a hurry. I know my lady is very ambitious about Ju, and the girl's fit to be a queen, in my opinion ; still she *may* be induced to listen to you ; for I tell you, you're in her good books. Only put it as a favour, you know ; put it as a favour. If my lady gets upon the high ropes, let her dance till she's tired ; she'll soon come down again, but she likes people to say 'yes' to her, just at first. God

bless you! my boy, and good luck to you! I think you would be good to Julia, and that is everything with me—above rank and riches, and all besides in the world!”

So Walter, much encouraged, remounted to ride up to the house, and Lord Waywarden, looking after him, shook his head more than once, while he pictured to himself his Countess, cold and stately in her morning-room. “I don’t envy him his job,” he muttered, returning to the farm-book and the fat pigs; but he could not settle to anything now, for thinking of his child. To put his own oar in at such a crisis he felt would do more harm than good, so his lordship thought he had better walk across the park, and inspect some lately purchased Herefords.

“I believe it will come off after all,” said Walter to himself, as he rang the door-bell, and asked if Lady Waywarden was at home. He had scarcely yet recovered his first unexpected success, and felt that to stop now in his career would be inexcusable.

Nevertheless, he dreaded the interview not a little. He envied Mr. Silke’s composure, as that immovable man ushered him through two or

three drawing-rooms, with blazing fires, hot-house flowers, and, indeed, a hot-house atmosphere, to the door of her ladyship's own snuggerly. Here, I think, if he had been *really* in love, he would have bolted outright; but he only fancied he was, so he made a plunge, and went in.

Notwithstanding the climate she affected, Lady Waywarden's fingers were very cold when she shook hands with him. The chill seemed to run up his elbows and curdle about the nape of his neck. She had been writing, of course, but she laid her pen down with the utmost politeness, and inquired after his family, *seriatim*, in a tone that implied the most complete indifference to his answers, adding, as she stretched her cold white hand to the bell, "Of course, you'll have some luncheon, Mr. Brooke? I believe it is hardly over yet."

Now Walter had been collecting his energies for this, the great difficulty of his undertaking, and a bright idea struck him like an inspiration, even while her ladyship was speaking. "This woman," he thought, "must be *startled* into a *consent*. Conventional forms, and the restrictions of polite society are the elements in which she lives; but

she has not seen a man *in earnest* for twenty years, and will not know how to defend herself against a bit of high wrought feeling and romance. It will come all the better, too, from me, whom she has hitherto believed such another as herself. Here goes! I suppose a man may stoop to conquer as well as a woman!"

Accordingly, ere she could reach the bell, he had seized the folds of her rich velvet skirt, and was down on his knees, in the very whitest spot of the hearth-rug, at her feet. Lady Waywarden had, certainly, never been so astonished in her life before.

First, she thought he was mad, and feared him; then that he was in love with her himself—poor young man! and pitied him, though reprovngly. Lastly, she made out what he wanted, and felt interested in spite of her cold, worldly heart.

"Nobody can help me but you, Lady Waywarden," said he, pressing her dress against his lips; "I have nobody to consult, nobody to advise, nobody to pity me. Ever since I can remember, I have looked upon you as something nobler and wiser, and more beautiful than a woman; perhaps it is this very feeling that tortures me now, for love of

one who is like you in body, and mind, and intellect, and heart. I have nothing to urge in my own favour; nothing to give me value in your eyes; nothing to say but this: that I love your daughter, Lady Julia, so wildly, so madly, so fondly, that if you can find it in your heart to be pitiless, and go against me to-day, I shall never lift up my head again!"

Then he went and sat down away from her, leaning his brow against a *buhl* table, as if ashamed of his ebullition.

"I *am* surprised!—I freely confess I *am* surprised!" said Lady Waywarden, lifting both her cold white hands in the attitude of a mediæval saint, and hoping sincerely that, in his agitation, he might not brush some old china off the table, with his elbow. "Compose yourself, Mr. Brooke. This violence is, perhaps, unnecessary, after all. Am I to understand that your declaration is to be considered a proposal in form for the hand of my daughter, Lady Julia Treadwell?"

Walter intimated energetically enough that was what he meant, hinting, at the same time, that the young lady's likeness to her mother constituted her real value in his eyes.

“There are difficulties, Mr. Brooke: you cannot but see there are great difficulties,” continued her ladyship, spreading out her robes, and seating herself royally in an arm-chair, as if it were a throne. “The match is hardly suitable in a worldly point of view, even were all other considerations satisfactorily arranged. At the same time, if my daughter’s happiness were involved, I should be the last person to stand in its way, as too many mothers do, from mere mercenary motives. Of course, Julia would require a suitable establishment, though it is extremely premature to discuss anything of that kind at present.”

“Whatever you thought suitable, Lady Waywarden, must be right. Your good sense and good taste would be invaluable in all such matters,” answered Walter, looking up from the table.

He found the game easier than he expected, and, like a skilful billiard-player, resolved now he had got “a break,” to make a good score off the balls.

Lady Waywarden reflected for a few moments, during which, I believe, her thoughts travelled

back to her own image in a long glass, dressed in white and orange-blossoms, under a bridal veil. Then she asked, with a sigh—

“Have you any reason to believe my daughter’s feelings are already interested in this, your very—very—*unexpected* proposal, Mr. Brooke?”

There was a winning hazard to play for here, and he made it without fail.

“I would not have even hinted at such a thing,” said he, raising her ladyship’s hand to his lips, “till I had consulted my first friend!”

“I must say that is very honourable—very honourable, indeed,” answered the Countess, with a little provoking consciousness, notwithstanding all her approbation, that she herself, when Julia’s age, would have liked her own opinion to be asked first. “I cannot but admire your prudence and delicacy; indeed, it is most unusual in so young a man. And I have been told—excuse me, Mr. Brooke—that you have been a little—what shall I say? rather—in short—not altogether steadier than your neighbours?”

“I never had a mother’s teaching, Lady Waywarden. You must think of that, and make allowances. The other boys of my own age used

to write home to their mothers when they wanted anything, and I could scarcely remember mine. I often envy Nethersole, when I think that, with all his many advantages, he possesses in your care the very greatest of all. I might have been *so* different if she had lived."

He really thought so for the moment, and his voice shook with an emotion that was only half put on. It was a splendid stroke, boldly conceived and boldly executed. I believe it won him the game.

Lady Waywarden's words came huskily when she answered. She had not wept for so many years that the tears got no further than her throat, but they were there sure enough when she thought of the poor little motherless boy at school, and her own son's letter received but yesterday, asking for a variety of articles totally unconnected with his studies.

"You cannot expect a definite answer at once, Mr. Brooke," she said, surprised at her inmost heart by her own tendency to acquiesce in so romantic a proceeding, and a little vain of her unworldliness besides. "The thing is altogether so sudden. You have taken me so completely by

surprise, and, of course, Lord Waywarden must be consulted."

Walter was far too good a player, and knew the table too well, to confess that he had already obtained a conditional consent from that nobleman. He took her ladyship's hand once more, and kissed it reverentially.

"If I only have *you* on my side," said he, "I am sure of victory. I shall be the happiest man in the world, and owe it all to your kind heart."

"Well, if it depends on *me*," answered Lady Waywarden, "I will not vote against you; I can promise *that*. Now you may go and see Julia, if you like. I suppose you don't care about any luncheon. You are almost sure to find her in the conservatory."

Lady Julia *was* in the conservatory, sure enough, ostensibly snipping the dead leaves off sundry plants, with a pair of garden scissors. I believe no atmosphere can be wholesome when raised to an artificial temperature, and this may have been the reason why her colour went and came so variably, and her heart beat so much faster than could be accounted for by the mere act of stooping over a flower-pot.

She had heard the door-bell ring, and meeting Mr. Silke as she left the dining-room, where she had finished luncheon, inquired, with pardonable curiosity, the name of the visitor.

“Mr. Brooke, my lady,” answered that well-drilled domestic, softly and imperturbably, as he would have announced the Emperor of Morocco, or any other notability. “He asked for her ladyship, and is gone into the morning-room.”

How can I tell what she was thinking of? or why she started, turning red and pale? I believe she was going upstairs to put on her things, for a walk, but she changed her mind, perhaps opining it looked like rain, and retraced her steps to the blue drawing-room, whence she proceeded into the conservatory, and snipped off a dozen or so of very promising shoots, without discovering the mischief she was about.

A man's step on the tessellated floor made her look up, and her countenance fell visibly ere Walter reached her side. Nevertheless, her confusion had completely vanished when she accosted him by name, asking cordially and kindly how he had left them all at Bridlemere.

You have seen a child in a white frock hunting a butterfly round a garden: from clove to carnation, from hollyhock to heliotrope, from rose to mignonette, the pretty painted thing quivers and settles, and flutters off again into the summer sky, just as the hot little hand is in the act of closing on its prize. The pursuit, like that of pleasure, is endless, enticing, disappointing. After mirth, effort, failure, and vexation, the disgusted little hunter generally sits down to cry.

Lady Julia was like the butterfly. From flower to flower she flitted; from subject to subject she roved, and Walter could not fix her; could not drive her into a corner; could not get her on a topic that might give him the opportunity he required.

Perhaps she suspected him, and fought off from maiden modesty; perhaps she enjoyed his discomfiture, and tantalized him for sheer amusement. She plied him with questions on practical matters that no amount of ingenuity could twist into a romantic shape; she told him anecdotes fresh from London by that morning's post with a volubility that left him no chance of getting in a word; and he could not but laugh, in spite of himself, at

her sarcastic comments and quaint powers of narration. All these artifices, however, only increased his determination to capture this golden-winged butterfly ; and, indeed, the prize looked sufficiently alluring to have tempted even an older, and wiser, and less necessitous man.

She was dressed in a very dark-coloured velvet, adapted, as she considered, for out-of-door work and country wear, which, fitting quite close to her bust and shoulders, fell in long ample folds below the waist, giving her beautifully-moulded form an appearance of greater height than it possessed. Under a little white lace collar she wore a broad light green ribbon—the only bit of colour in her whole dress—very becoming, as doubtless she well knew, to the delicate bloom of her complexion, and the glory of her rich chestnut hair.

The diamond eyes gleamed and sparkled, bright as the jewels in her perfect little ears ; and the clear fair face, with its well-cut features, broke into sunny smiles with every changing topic that arose, but there was a strange resolute expression about the rosy lips, that deepened and deepened, as Walter's tone grew more and more serious and affectionate. With all her beauty—youthful, saucy, and

attractive though it was—she looked a lady who could depend upon herself in any emergency, either of body or mind.

“Bless me!” thought Walter, “how like she is to the print in Jack’s bedroom!”

It was strange that this resemblance should have struck him now for the first time. There was no leisure, however, to follow out the train of ideas such a discovery might have originated, for he saw his opportunity at this very moment, and hastened to take advantage of it.

Lady Julia was reaching up, with the garden-scissors, to amputate some rusty shoots from a pendent plant with a long Latin name she could not, she said, have pronounced in a month. Her waist looked particularly taper and inviting in this attitude. His arm was round it in an instant, and the scissors fell on the varnished pavement, with a clang.

She disengaged herself in a rapid, snake-like twirl, not agitated nor frightened, nor even astonished, only—as he could not but perceive to his great discomfiture—somewhat amused.

“This is a bad floor for waltzing, Mr. Brooke,” said she, composedly; “and the place altogether

too hot for a dance. Let us walk back into the drawing-room !”

He knew the match was lost now : the player’s instinct seldom deceives him in such matters. Nevertheless, he resolved to finish the game.

“Hear me, Lady Julia,” said he, trying to take her hand, which, however, she did not yield, keeping him, as he afterwards observed, at “practising distance.” “Only three words. I will not detain you long. You—you spoke of names just now ; could you not be persuaded to change yours ?”

Of course, she knew as well as he did what was coming. She ought to have blushed, hesitated, cried a little—how can I tell ? Perhaps even fainted away. If so, she was by no means perfect in her part, for she did not so much as turn red, and her eyes gleamed maliciously, while she asked—

“Change it ? I don’t know that I should. But for what ?”

“Would you hate,” said he, gently—“would you hate to be Lady Julia Brooke ?”

Such a soft, loving look stole over the face he was watching, that for an instant he almost fancied he had won, but she shook her head

quietly, and a little sorrowfully, murmuring in a low tone—

“I am never likely to be Julia Brooke. Let us talk about something else.”

“Not till I have had my answer,” said he, impatiently, for his temper was beginning to fail him, and it was no time now for misapprehension or mistake. “I have your father’s sanction and your mother’s consent. I have a right to ask you point-blank to be my wife. Oh, Lady Julia, I *do* love you! It is wrong to trifle with my feelings any longer.”

He tried to put his arm round her once more, but again she took up her distance so skilfully that he was foiled. It seemed strange she should be so much the cooler and more composed of the two; but then, besides that her heart was completely untouched, she would not have married *him*, of all people, for any consideration in the world.

“Papa and mamma are very accommodating,” said she, with a little malicious curtesy. “Don’t you think I am the person whose taste has to be consulted first?”

“And your taste is for something nobler, and

richer, and altogether a better match than the poor devil of a younger brother," he answered, rather ungenerously, adding in a cold, haughty tone, "I ought to have known, I suppose, that it was unpardonable presumption to fancy a Brooke could be a match for Lady Julia Treadwell. I accept my dismissal, and will never trouble you to speak to me again."

"Now don't be an ass, Walter!" said she, coming closer to him, and taking both his hands, while she looked up in his face with a frank, kindly smile. "What's the good of talking such utter bosh? You're not a bad boy when you're reasonable. We have always been the best of friends, and always shall be. I would no more quarrel with you than with my brother. But you know as well as I do, Walter, that it's stuff to talk about anything in the shape of—of—*real* love" (she got it out with a blush) "between you and me. Don't be angry; we've had our breeze; shake hands, and think no more about it."

He tried to put a heart-broken expression into his face, but somehow failed. He was angry, no doubt—disappointed, humiliated, provoked; yet there was something ludicrous in his position,

even to himself. He raised his eyes to hers, they looked at each other for about ten seconds, and then both burst out laughing.

“I *knew* you were a good fellow, Walter,” said her ladyship, with a cordial squeeze of both her pretty hands, “and I’m not deceived in you. We shall always be fast friends; and if ever I can do you a good turn, I will, as sure as my name’s Julia. You had better go now. I’ll let you out of the conservatory, and you can get round to the stables without passing through the house. Leave me to settle with mamma. I’ll let you down easy enough, you may be sure. I hav’n’t half thanked you for the compliment. It *is* a compliment, I suppose? But you won’t mind about that. I’ll show my gratitude some day, never fear. In the meantime, God bless you, Walter, and good-bye.”

She seemed still to be speaking, at least her voice was yet ringing in his ears, while he threaded the shrubbery and found his way to the stables. There he swung himself into the saddle, and started for home at the most liberal pace his fast and well-bred charger could command.

Walter was not yet accustomed to defeat or disappointment, particularly in such affairs as that

which had brought him to Tollesdale. It was very unusual for him to fail with the opposite sex, and this was his first appearance in the character of a discarded suitor. It seemed so strange to come away without a trophy of any kind—a flower, a glove, a trinket, not even the mark left by a glossy fragrant head upon the collar of his coat. He could scarcely realize the fact that he, Walter Brooke, of the Dancing Hussars, had been refused!

It is wonderful how a man in difficulties retires, as it were, upon one point after another, considering each in its turn the impregnable citadel he can never be forced to abandon. Wonderful how the gambler trusts ever to the next card dealt, the next main thrown, for recovery of his hopes and dawn of eventual success. Walter pinned his faith on Benedict now; and although it was doubtless unpleasant, nay, humiliating, to be foiled, particularly after obtaining both parents' consent, there was a certain gleam of consolation through the gloom in the reflection, that if the horse he had backed so heavily *did* pull it off, he was better without a wife after all.

“Fellows seem to get tired of matrimony,”

thought Walter, scouring down a grassy avenue that opened on the Middlesworth road. "I've heard lots of married men swear that it never can pay. And then the settlements, and the *trousseaux*, and the trotting-out to be crabbed by the collaterals, and the dreadful family-dinners that have to be solemnized before the event. Upon my soul, I think I am well out of it! Oh, Benedict! Benedict! I know you have the pace, and I know they will run you straight. If you *can* but stay, notwithstanding all my ups and downs, I might pull through at last!"

Then, like the stab of a knife, came the recollection of the two bills, and, catching the poor charger fiercely by the head, he urged him faster and faster, to the extremity of his speed.

Lord Waywarden, walking uneasily about amongst the white-faced bullocks, espied his young friend riding thus recklessly away. He was at no loss to infer failure in the suitor's errand, but attributed his defeat to a wrong cause.

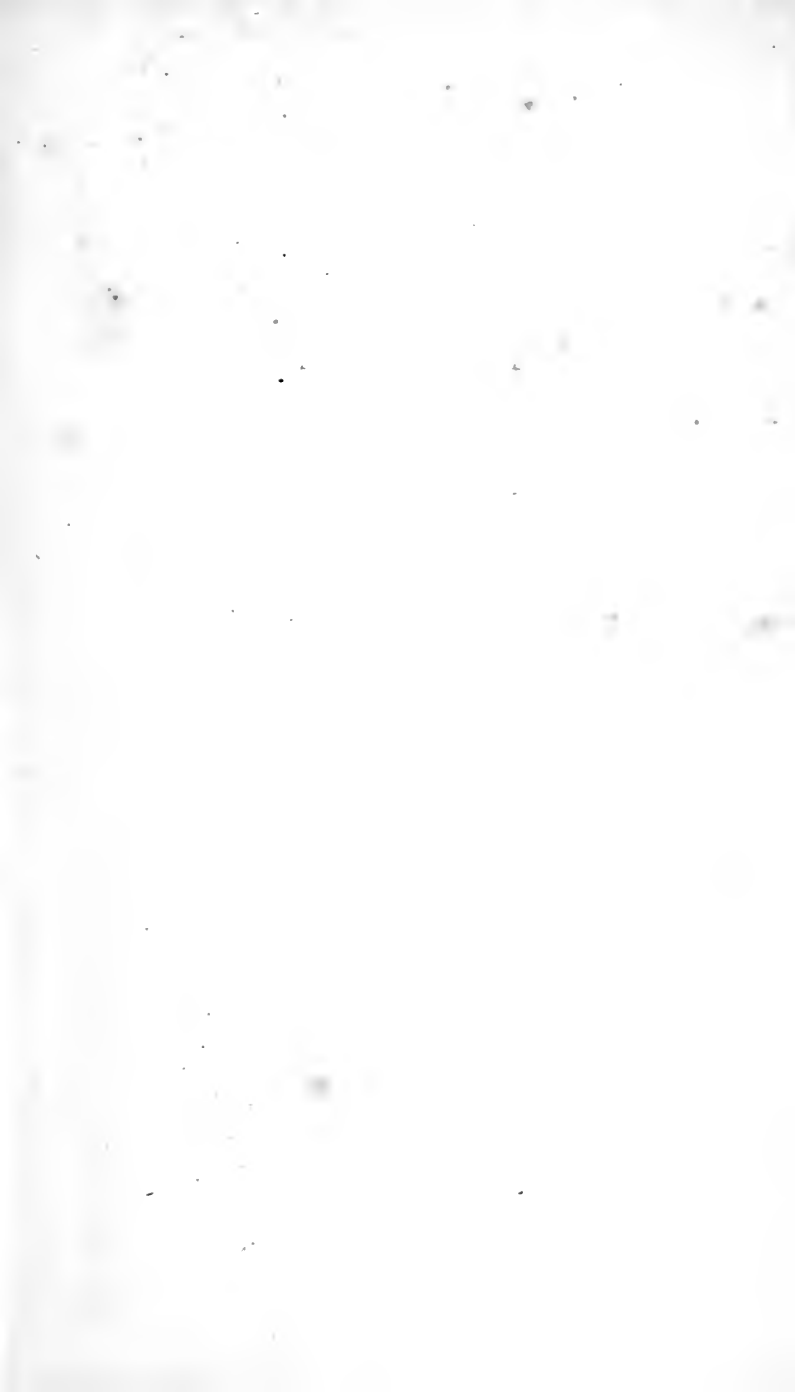
"He's had a rough time of it with my lady," said Waywarden to his Herefords. "A very rough time of it, I'll be bound. Poor lad! he's never

seen my lady with her back up. I shouldn't wonder if she astonished him a good deal. Now, if Ju fancies this light dragoon—and I don't see why she shouldn't, for he's about the right pattern—there's a nice piece of work cut out for *me*! Dear, dear, it's hard to have got old and heavy, and bald and slow, only to be bothered with women's likes and dislikes to the end of the chapter. Perhaps I'd better go at once and have it out with my lady. Then we'll see what can be done for Ju."

It is needless to add that, notwithstanding the loss of an afternoon's farming, his lordship was much relieved when he got home and discovered the real state of the case.

END OF VOL. II.

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